

D. D. W.
4473 b-58

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

MYSTERIES

OF

Divine Providence.

[Price Stitched 1s. 6d. Bound 2s.]

CATALOGUE

Wol signaturis nichil nisi hinc sicut
sibi recte dicere vix possem in nobis. nos
hinc signaturis sicut possem in nobis
sicut et iustis utrumque. ~~hinc~~ sicut et illis si
hinc et iustis. ~~hinc~~ sicut et iustis. sicut et illis si
hinc et iustis.

JEZUUS JESUS

A circular blue ink stamp from the British Museum. The outer ring contains the text 'BRITISH MUSEUM' in capital letters. The center of the stamp features a heraldic design with a lion and a unicorn standing back-to-back, supporting a shield. Below the shield, the year '1850' is stamped.



*The unsearchable Depth of God's
Judgments considered:*

OR, A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
MYSTERIES
OF
DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

*By the late Reverend
Mr. JOSEPH COLLET.*

L O N D O N:
Printed for **AARON WARD**, in *Little-Britain.*
M DCC XLII.

DISCOURSE

ON THE

BRITISH MUSEUM



BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE

IN THE MUSEUM OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

BY W. D. OWEN



104987

the beginning of their punishment in their
Christianity as to the last and best end of their
life had
the world as to the way to their salvation
in their belief as to the truth and truth
and the
T O T H E

R E A D E R.

THE absolute sovereignty of God, is a fundamental principle, of natural, as well as revealed religion. The doctrine of providence, as well as grace, depends upon it: and it must needs be owing to the pride of fallen nature, that so rational a principle should meet with any opposition. But it is well known, that many of those, who have been quarrelling with the mysteries of revelation, because they cannot perfectly reconcile them to the rules, they have ventured to lay down, for the regulation of the divine conduct, have, for the same reason, of late, laboured their attack on the doctrine of particular providence:

P R E F A C E.

vidence: and this, it is to be feared, may naturally pave the way to a disbelief of providence in general, and then, to that of the very being of God himself.

AT a time, therefore, when infidelity is making such bold advances as these, every humble and sincere attempt to vindicate both the rights, and the conduct, of the sovereign disposer of all things, must needs be very grateful, to all those, who have his honour at heart.

THOUGH the situation of the reverend author of this discourse, was but obscure; yet his pious, and contemplative mind was richly furnished with many useful observations on this subject, with which he was accustomed to entertain those, who had the pleasure of his conversation. A conversation so instructive! that I remember to have heard a judicious friend of his once say, that it was not easy to sit in Mr. Collet's company for a quarter of an hour, without having an opportunity to receive, some

P R E F A C E.

some useful and spiritual advantage. However, therefore, it may fare with this discourse, in other respects, I persuade myself, it will be a very acceptable present to those of his acquaintance, whose tears are not yet dried up for the loss of so excellent a minister, and so valuable a friend; and, that they will make all proper allowances, for the want of his last hand to it.

AS I have read the manuscript with great pleasure; so I take leave to add my hearty wishes, that the publication of it may be happily useful, to convince men, that the greatest intricacies of providence will furnish them with no proper arguments against the truth of it; but that the absolute superintendence of God, in our minutest affairs, is a most rational doctrine in itself, and receives the fullest evidence from divine revelation: and I would hope also, that, by the judicious remarks in this work, the humble, afflicted, and timorous Christian may be encouraged, and comforted, under the darkest dispensations he may meet with, in his way to that world, where all the mysteries of grace, as well

P R E F A C E.

well as providence, will be unfolded; and when the beautiful side of the embroidery will be laid fully open to his view, and all the present seeming irregularities in it, will vanish away. For now we know but in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

JOSEPH STENNETT.



A D I S.

A

DISCOURSE

ON

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

PSALM XXXVI. 6.

—*Thy Judgments are a great deep.*

IT is connatural to the very being of mankind to desire happiness; and not finding it in themselves, various and very different are the ways in which they seek it: but as the most are sadly mistaken in their conceptions of it, so they are like for ever to be disappointed in their pursuits after it. The things in which they propose to find their happiness will in the end prove fatal, and their product will be everlasting misery.

THAT which makes man happy, must be something above himself, and what is sufficient to answer the wishes and desires of his capacious soul, and fill his grasping mind with perfect delight and satisfying pleasure; it must be something of endless duration, and which is not subject to any

B decay;

decay ; for the fear of losing it, or of its being impaired, wotuld render the present enjoyment of it incompleat : and since man must exist for ever, that only which is everlasting can make him truly blessed. All things below the Supreme Majesty being imperfect in their nature, and uncertain in their continuance, do, therefore, evidently declare that our happiness is not in them. And it follows then, that to know and enjoy the all-comprehending God, is the chiefest good, and the only perfect blessedness, which it is every man's interest as well as duty, immedately, and principally to seek after. *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace : thereby good shall come unto thee*^a.

Now the mediums God has ordained, and blessed, to convey the knowledge of himself to the children of men, and which we are daily and diligently to improve, in order to obtain this knowledge, are his word and works : and the light we receive from the one, will contribute much to our help in conceiving of the other.

THE works of God presented to the contemplation of all men are twofold, *viz.* those of *creation*, and those of *providence*. It is the latter of these that I am at present to consider, *viz.* the works of providence. And of these some are more common,

in

^a Job xxii. 21.

intelligible, and easy to be understood ; and others more dark, mysterious, and puzzling.

Of these unfathomable depths of the holy and wise conduct of that infinite Being who governs the universe, the inspired *Psalmist* is speaking in the words of our text ; *Thy judgments*, says he, *are a great deep* : an observation which he might well make from his own experience ; being not only kept from the kingdom, but hotly pursued by *Saul* and his bloody courtiers, and that for a long time after the scepter had been promised him, and *Samuel* had anointed him, by the divine command : and this is thought indeed to be the occasion of this *psalm* ; wherein, having declaimed against the daring and abounding wickedness he had too commonly observed among men, and in an especial manner among his unjust, ungodly, and treacherous enemies ; at the 5th verse, he enters upon a more eligible and pleasant subject, and sweetly dilates on the glorious perfections of the Supreme Being : his mind being wearied and depressed with contemplating the vileness and baseness of men, he now employs himself in admiring, and applauding the goodness and mercy of God, *Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens*, q. d. “ thy mercy is “ not only apparent in all the earth, but it is “ larger than the vast unmeasurable spaces

“ between earth and heaven :” he adds; *thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds*, i. e. 'tis far above our reach, and sometimes we are at a loss to believe it, and cannot fully comprehend it at any time, but God will certainly discover the unchangeable glory thereof, by fulfilling his threatenings and promises, in all the various dispensations of his providence towards the children of men: for his *righteousness is like a great mountain*^b, i. e. fixed and immovable, and often very conspicuous and discernable, though sometimes too high for the short line of our reason to measure, and too vast for our weak minds to comprehend: which sense agrees well with what follows in our text, *Thy judgments are a great deep.*

By the *judgments* of God we are to understand the execution of his wise counsels, or his holy and infallible administrations, in preserving, and conducting all the works of his hands, which we call his providence; so the word is taken, *Rom. xi. 33. how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* i. e. his providential ways being, as our text expresses it, *a great deep*, in allusion to the unfathomable waters in the deepest parts of the ocean, which cannot be sounded by man: so, some of the providences of God especially, are very dark, mysterious, and

^b verf. 6.

and hard to be understood, and too great a deep for frail mortals to fathom: such are those which I design now principally to consider; and in order to be particular and distinct therein, I shall lay down some preliminary propositions.

PROP. I. *That as God made the world, and all things therein; so he certainly does preserve, and govern the same, by his holy providence.*

Is it not as easy to suppose, with *Aristotle*, that the world was from eternity, and God did not in time create it; as to imagine with *Epicurus* that he does not uphold or conduct it, but intirely neglects, and abandons the work of his own hands? "The " blessed and immortal Being, saith he, hath " no employment himself, nor troubleth " himself with others." But may we not also suppose *Epicurus* to be as ignorant of the excellent nature of the *God of Heaven*, as he was of the glorious luminaries which enlighten this earth; for he neither conceived the stars, nor the sun, to be any bigger than they appear to our view. And no wonder, for he looked on the senses as the only certain means of conveying the truth of things to the mind. But though many

B 3 of

* *Stillingfleet's Orig. Sacra*, p. 473. See also p. 231, 248, and 397.

of the heathens denied the providence of that God, *in whom they lived, moved, and had their beings*; yet others did own it, at least as managing the most weighty concerns of this lower world. Thus the mariners going to *Tarshish*, *Jonah* i. 4. (when God sent a great wind into the sea, and their ship was like to be broken by a mighty tempest) all acknowledge the hand of a Deity, and cry every man to his God; rightly apprehending that it was for sin that they were brought into this imminent and dreadful danger, they also solemnly and practically own, that when *the lot was cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord*; i. e. that events which are casual and accidental as to us, are under the direction of the wise counsel, and sovereign providence of God. Therefore they resolved to cast lots, that they might know for whose sin it was heaven thus frowned upon them. And thus owning God in their distress, by appealing unto him, he decides the matter, and marks out his own prophet as the criminal. Whatsoever gods they had prayed to, in the first approaches of their distress; yet they seek only to the great *Je-hovah* to discover the cause thereof; and in the close of these apparent and terrible instances of the divine conduct, they frankly

ly and sensibly own, that *the Lord had done as it pleased him*, i. e. he *had done as it pleased him*², in pursuing and arresting his disobedient prophet, and in discovering that he was the person, on whose account, the great evil of such a terrible tempest was come upon them; as also in bringing his offending servant to confess his guilt, and in continuing their danger so long as he remained in the ship. Thus we see the rude pagan mariners, as they owned the infinite Deity, so they did confess him the Supreme Agent, who disposed, at least the more weighty events, and occurrences of this world. And many of the heathens have been so far from entertaining that sottish conceit of *Epicurus*, that it would be an incumbrance to the most perfect Being, and an interruption to his felicity, to concern himself in the government of this world; that they have not only declaimed against it, as flowing from an unworthy conception of God, and as the cause of much wickedness among men; but many of them have left noble testimonies to the truth we have under consideration, *viz.* that God governs the world, and all things therein, by his wise and holy Providence. Thus *Plutarch* saith, "If *Epicurus* would grant a God in his full perfection, he must change his

B 4

" wicked

2 verf. 14.

of the heathens denied the providence of that God, *in whom they lived, moved, and had their beings*; yet others did own it, at least as managing the most weighty concerns of this lower world. Thus the mariners going to *Tarsish*, *Jonah* i. 4. (when God sent a great wind into the sea, and their ship was like to be broken by a mighty tempest) all acknowledge the hand of a Deity, and cry every man to his God; rightly apprehending that it was for sin that they were brought into this imminent and dreadful danger, they also solemnly and practically own, that when the lot was cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord^d; i. e. that events which are casual and accidental as to us, are under the direction of the wise counsel, and sovereign providence of God. Therefore they resolved to cast lots, that they might know for whose sin it was heaven thus frowned upon them. And thus owning God in their distress, by appealing unto him, he decides the matter, and marks out his own prophet as the criminal. Whatsoever gods they had prayed to, in the first approaches of their distress; yet they seek only to the great *Je-hovah* to discover the cause thereof; and in the close of these apparent and terrible instances of the divine conduct, they frankly

ly and sensibly own, that *the Lord had done as it pleased him*, i. e. he *had done as it pleased him* ; in pursuing and arresting his disobedient prophet, and in discovering that he was the person, on whose account, the great evil of such a terrible tempest was come upon them ; as also in bringing his offending servant to confess his guilt, and in continuing their danger so long as he remained in the ship. Thus we see the rude pagan mariners, as they owned the infinite Deity, so they did confess him the Supreme Agent, who disposed, at least the more weighty events, and occurrences of this world. And many of the heathens have been so far from entertaining that sottish conceit of *Epicurus*, that it would be an incumbrance to the most perfect Being, and an interruption to his felicity, to concern himself in the government of this world ; that they have not only declaimed against it, as flowing from an unworthy conception of God, and as the cause of much wickedness among men ; but many of them have left noble testimonies to the truth we have under consideration, *viz.* that God governs the world, and all things therein, by his wise and holy Providence. Thus *Plutarch* saith, “ If *Epicurus* would grant a God in “ his full perfection, he must change his

B 4

“ wicked

: ver. 14.

“ wicked life immediately, and be a swine
 “ no longer.” And *Herodotus* reports of
Cambyses king of *Perſia*, “ that he was
 “ hated by his subjects for his cruelty ; and
 “ that the people were not unwilling, in
 “ his absence, to have another usurper :
 “ which thing coming to his ear, he fur-
 “ riously alighting from his horse, with an
 “ intent to have gone against the usurper,
 “ his sword fell out of the scabbard and
 “ ran into his thigh or belly, and killed
 “ him : ” which this heathen writer ascribes
 to providence, and not to chance. *Thales*,
 an ancient philosopher, reputed one of the
 seven wise men of *Greece*, held, “ First,
 “ that God was most ancient : Secondly,
 “ that the world was his work : Thirdly,
 “ that by his immutable decree and pro-
 “ vidence he governs it^f. ” *Plato*, who is
 thought to have lived about the time of the *Ba-*
bylonish captivity, saith, “ he received his know-
 “ ledge of the government of the world by
 “ providence, from the wise^g. He also assert-
 “ ed, that a special providence attended good
 “ men, and that whatever happened to a friend
 “ of God, was best for him ; ” and, de-
 scribing religion, he saith, “ it is to believe
 “ there is a God, who is the beginning,
 “ middle, and end of all things ; and
 “ whose

^f *Gale's Court of the Gent.* pt. ii. p. 115.

^g *Ibid.* p. 75. See p. 126.

" whose providence runs through all parts
 " of the universe ^h. And *Cicero*, as I find
 him quoted by the learned *Charnock*, saith,
 " that the *Roman Commonwealth* was ra-
 " ther governed by the assistance of the
 " Supreme Divinity over the hearts of men;
 " than by their own counsel and manage-
 " ment ⁱ." *Socrates* also said, " he that
 " denied Providence was possessed with a
 " Devil." And the eminently learned and
 judicious *Mornay*, lord of *Plessie marke*, tells
 us of an heathen, *Avicen the Arabian*, who
 said, " he that denied the One God, and
 " his Providence in all things, is not only
 " witless, but also senseless." Methinks
 also the practice of their warriors seems to
 give some testimony hereunto; for other-
 wise why did they make such solemn vows
 to their gods, before they engaged in their
 military enterprises, and devoutly pay them
 if they proved successful therein; unless
 they believed that those momentous affairs
 at least, were under the cognizance, and go-
 vernment of some superior Being? And it
 is observable, that " some of the heathens, in
 " their adorations turned their bodies to
 " all quarters, to signify the extensive do-
 " minion of God throughout the whole
 " earth ^k;" which is a certain truth, and
 plainly

^h *Ibid.* part 4th. p. 235. and 497. ⁱ *Charn.*
 vol. i. p. 744. ^k *Charn.* on the Attrib. p. 704.

plainly taught by the book of nature, or works of creation: for he that made the world must perfectly know, and understand how to guide and direct it: it is impossible to suppose him uncapable of ordering every thing in the best manner, who is the sole author of all things that exist. And surely, that God, who could so easily form such a noble fabrick as the world, and furnish it with such a variety of wonderful inhabitants, must needs be infinitely capable of governing it without mistakes, and perfect in power, to exercise his wise providence without any toil or pains. God can more easily preserve and rule the whole world, than we can draw a breath: and to suppose that he can, but will not, must arise, either from an apprehension that it is needless for him so to do, or that he is without that tender regard to the off-spring of his almighty power, which we poor mortals have, or ought to have, to the fruit of our loins. Are parents, who do but instrumentally give being to their children, enjoined by the laws of nature, as well as nations, to take care of them; and shall we think that the universal parent of the world, who inclines not only rational, but animal creatures to take care of their production, does like an idle and unconcerned spectator, behold the work of his

own

own hands, wholly leaving the contrivances of his adorable wisdom, and the wonderful monuments of his almighty power, at the disposal of stubborn fate, or uncertain chance? Besides, to what end did God create the world? Was it not for his own pleasure and praise? Now the world can no more answer the end of its creation, than it could propose an end in being created, unless he, who is the first cause of all things, doth guide, as well as uphold it, that it may answer his grand design, in bringing it out of nothing.

THIS truth is also evident from the continuance of the world. For it can no more continue, than it could at first exist, without, God, whose hand at first formed it, is pleased to uphold it. And we may as well suppose all things might have their being, without the creating power of the Almighty, as that any thing can be preserved, without his supporting providence. As the world is compounded of parts so contrary in nature, that it cannot be thought they would have met together, had they not been conjoined by the unlimited power of a Deity; so we may justly conclude that those very different and contending qualities, that are in every part, would soon reduce the whole creation to its original chaos, were not the Creator's power constantly exercised, and gloriously displayed, in

in upholding the work of his hands. Hence preservation has been commonly called a continued creation, every thing being preserved by the same power, which at first gave it being ; for not only rational, but animal creatures *live and move in him* : *he giveth to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens when they cry*¹ ; *the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God*^m. The *innumerable creeping things* also, that are on the *earth*, or in the *sea*, *these wait on him, who gives them their meat in due season, and when he hides his face they are troubled, and when he takes away their breath they die, and return to their dust*ⁿ. And to what shall we ascribe the beautiful cloathing of *the lillies of the field*, which excels that of *Solomon*^o, or the gay ornaments in which the earth annually appears, but to the providence of God ? Yea, if we should ascend from the meanest to the highest order of creatures, we may safely assert even concerning them, that as they have their perfect blessedness with God, and from him ; so their existence, and their blessedness will for ever depend upon him : for it is incompatible with the nature of a creature, and the incommunicable property of the eternal God, to be independent.

MORE-

¹ Psal. cxlvii. 9. ^m Psal. civ. 21. ⁿ verf. 25,
—29. ^o Matt. vi. 28, 29.

MOREOVER, that God is the universal œconomist or governor of the world is further manifest, in that, neither wicked men nor devils are suffered to do all the mischief which their nature prompts them to, and which they would certainly do, were they not restrained by the powerful hand of divine Providence. As to Satan, we know that *as his name is, so is he* (i. e. an *adversary*) and that he is an *adversary* not only of great power, but of greater malice, and so greatly doth he envy the happiness of men, that he fails not to do his uttermost to make them miserable, in this life, as well as in that which is to come: so that were there no superior Being that did restrain him, the whole world would be soon reduced to the most miserable circumstances, by the dreadful effects of his insatiable fury. Did God but remove the hedge of his protection, he would no more neglect, nor delay to plunder us, than he did *Job*: he would soon find persons of as covetous and bloody dispositions, as the *Sabeans* and *Chaldeans*, whom he would easily persuade to steal our cattle, and murder our servants: were he not restrained by him who is *God over all*, he would soon consume our goods with fire, and beat down our habitations with tempests as he did *Job's*: nay he would as certainly enter into our cattle, as into the swine of the *Gadarenes*, had he but

but liberty from the Lord of the universe. And who can imagine how we should be disturbed and affrighted with apparitions, and terrified with doleful sounds and hideous noises, had Satan but the same liberty he has had at some times, and in some places? And whereas the Devil employs the lying tongues of some men to abuse and slander the innocent servants of God, we cannot but conclude that the grand accuser would lay open all their faults and follies, that have come within his knowledge, that he might thereby discredit religion, harden many in their sins, and fill the faces of those with confusion before men, who have sincerely repented of their evils, and are freely pardoned of God, did not Providence, as to these things, in a great measure, strike him dumb. Nay he would be as cruel to our bodies as he was to that of *Job*; he would rack us night and day with bitter pains, and smite us from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, if God would but say to him concerning us, *lo they are in thy hands*. Our minds also he would fill with the most perplexing thoughts, and dreadful blasphemies, were he but suffered to exert his power, according to his malice and wickedness. The children of men are therefore unspeakably indebted to the Lord, for exercising his sovereign irresistible providence, in limiting and

and restraining the malice and power of the angels of darkness ; as also for checking the boistrous passions, and curbing the foaming lusts and corruptions of ungodly men, and thereby preventing the universal perpetration of those outrages, which, otherwise, would so far prevail, as to be destructive to all human societies. No laws would be strong enough to bind men's vicious inclinations, did not the powerful hand of the Supreme Majesty restrain the impetuous torrent thereof. There would be no living in the world, if God did not govern it. If all bonds of restraint were taken off from men's hellish lusts and furious passions, they would quickly destroy and devour one another. " Take away, saith *Tully*, the being and providence of God out of the world, and there follows nothing but perturbation and confusion in it ; not only all sanctity, piety, and devotion is destroyed ; but all faith, virtue, and human society too." That secret and powerful hand that prevented the neighbours of *Caanaan* from desiring the land of the *Jews*, while, pursuant to the divine command, all their males went three times a year up to *Jerusalem*, to appear before the Lord, and worship him^r, does still continue to restrain men from that violent wickedness, which would

^r Exod. xxiii. 17. compare with xxiv. 24.

would fill the world with confusion, and turn the earth into an *aceldama*, yea, make it a very hell to the people of God: for it is wofully evident that men are wicked enough to take away the lives of the most excellent and useful persons in the world, by perjury, as well as open violence; and so to cover their wickedness with a pretence of justice: and the great reason why the innocent are not daily hurried to tribunals, and condemned there, as rebels and traitors, is because their *times are in God's bands*; otherwise they that hate them so much while in the world, would soon find a short way to send them out of it. But he *that stilleth the noise of the seas*, stops also *the tumult of the people*^q, and bounds their rage and violence: he suffers so much of the *wrath of men* to break forth, as shall be subservient to his praise, and his people's profit, *and the remainder of their wrath be restraints*^r. But,

THAT which further proves our proposition is, that such remarkable miseries do often befall the wicked, and such signal salutations are sometimes granted to good men, which, without the greatest violence offered to our reason, we cannot ascribe to any thing but the righteous providence of God. What bright proofs of his just and sovereign government are some of his judgments especially?

^q Psal. lxxv. 7.

^r Psal. lxxvi. 10.

tially? and how impossible is it, any other way to account for them? as his sending great swarms of flies among the *Egyptians*, while none troubled the *Israelites*¹; and destroying, by a grievous murrain, the cattle of the one, while nothing died of all that appertained to the other? thus the Lord *severed between the cattle of Israel and Egypt*². Also on the *Egyptians* God sends a prodigious hail, such as they never saw before; but none fell in the land of *Goshen*, where the children of *Israel* dwelt³. The causes of these things none can discover; unless they say with the magicians, *this is the finger of God*⁴. And, to omit the remarkable and dreadful judgment of the locusts, if any clearer instance could be desired of the hand of God in human affairs, what abundant satisfaction may be received from that which follows? We read that, when *Moses stretched forth his hand towards heaven*, there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: they saw not one another, neither arose any from his place for three days; but all the children of *Israel* had light in their dwellings⁵.

MOREOVER, many of the righteous judgments of God on wicked men, are so suited to the nature of those crimes, by which they

C have

¹ Exod. viii. 21, 22. ² Exod. ix. 3, 4. ³ ver. 22.
chap. viii. 19. Exod. x. 22, 23.

have peculiarly provoked the eyes of his glory, that hereby it is fully manifested, that these things come not casually, but by the particular direction of Providence. *Pharaoh* required that all the *Hebrew* males should be most inhumanly murdered, that *Israel* might not be too strong for him, but that he might keep them his captives: and the just and terrible God smites *all the first-born in the land of Egypt*, from the first-born of *Pharaoh*, that sat on the throne, to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and *all the first-born of cattle*¹, and hereby makes way for the deliverance of his people. So that the very method, by which the hard-hearted tyrant thought to prolong their days of bondage, brings such successive and keen strokes of justice on himself, and his people, that he is at last intirely willing to release them, and glad to have them gone. And whereas such was *Pharaoh*'s bloody cruelty, that he appointed all the infant males of *Israel* to be cast into the river; does not the righteous God remarkably retaliate, first in turning the rivers of *Egypt* into blood, and at last, in making a grave for *Pharaoh* and all his host, in the *Red-Sea*? Thus he that wickedly drowned so many for his own safety, is, by the just judgment of God, drowned himself, while furiously seeking their destruction. We have variety of instances,

¹ Exod. xii. 29.

stances, which shew how God has suited his judgments, either to the nature of men's sins, or to the times when, and places where, they have been committed, and the instruments that have been employed in perpetrating those iniquities by which he has been provoked. Dr. *J. Mather*, in his discourse on Povidence, has taken notice of many pertinent instances of this kind. They that have not his excellent tract, will do well to compare the scriptures in the margin^a. To which I may add, that as the reigning sin of *Sodom* was burning and unnatural lust; so the just God consumed that unclean and filthy city, by raining fire and brimstone from heaven upon it. Cruel *Agag*'s merciless sword had made many tender *mothers* *childless*; and his *mother* is made *childless* among women, even after he thought the *bitterness* of *death* had been *past*^a. Haughty and blood-thirsty *Haman* could take no satisfaction in all his greatness and honour, unless *Mordecai* bowed the knee to him: neither would hanging *Mordecai* on a gallows of fifty cubits high, be a sufficient sacrifice to his unbounded pride, and insatiable rage; for he thought scorn to lay hands on *Mordecai* alone^b. But, behold the just retributions of Providence! he that, with

^a 1 Chron. xxi. 4. comp. vers. 17. Joel xxxvi.
&c. Judg. i. 7. chap. ix. 5. and vers. 52, &c.
^b 1 Sam. xv. 32, 33. Esther iii. 6.

diabolical malice, seeks the destruction of the church of God, thereby brings himself to a miserable end, as just, as it was shameful: he who pursued, and expected nothing less than all the dignity, that could be conferred *on the man, whom the king delighted to honour*, ends his life with the immortal infamy and shame of being hanged, on a lofty gallows of his own building. And how apparent is the parallel betwixt the sin, and the punishment, of *Nadab and Abihu*? They offered strange fire, and it was strange fire that killed them; for it did not burn their garments^c. And how many of the kings of *Israel* came to the throne by treason and murder, and were cut off in the same manner? *Had Zimri peace who slew his master*^d? The kings, princes, priests, and prophets of *Judah*, are all guilty of great idolatry, in worshipping and serving the host of heaven; and God threatens that their dead bones shall be brought out of their graves, and spread before the sun and moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they had loved; and that they should not be buried, but remain as dung upon the face of the earth^e. Thus God's judgments often bear the very image of those sins that have procured them.

Socrates, the ecclesiastical historian, tells us of *Valens* the emperor, a maintainer of *Arianism*,

^c Lev. x. ^d 2 Kings ix. 31 ^e Jer. viii. 1, 2.

Arianism, that when eighty orthodox christians sailed from *Constantinople* to *Nicomedia*, to treat with him about those points, and to settle the matter in difference, this wicked emperor, hearing of their approach, caused the ships to be fired wherein they were, and consumed them all. But, some time after, this cruel wretch, in his wars against the *Goths*, was worsted, and put to flight; and hiding himself in a little cottage, the enemy came by, and burnt the cottage, and him in it. "Here was, as one observes, *burning for burning*?" And it is remarkable, what our *English* chronicles relate concerning *William II.* surnamed *Rufus*, that having made a law, that whosoever killed a deer should suffer the same punishment as if he killed a man, was himself killed by Sir *Walter Tyrell*, as he was shooting at a deer: the deer escaped, but the king lost his life. Nay, when God's own children have *plowed iniquity*, they have *reaped the same*: as you may see in the case of *David*, 2 Sam. xii. 9, 10, 11.

God also has sometimes caused his terrible judgments to overtake men, in the very places where they have most remarkably provoked him with their sins. We have an eminent instance of this in the sentence of heaven against the children of *Judah*, for their horrible idolatry. The manner of

their burning their sons and daughters in the fire to *Moloch*, I find thus described. The idol being made hollow, had a fire kindled within it, and the child that was offered, was fixed in the hands of the idol, which were stretched out for that purpose; and so by the flames of fire, and heat of the idol, which was made of brass, it was burnt, and consumed. And that the voice of such tortured infants might not be heard, they used pipes, timbrels, and other instruments in the valley of *Tophet*, so called from *toph*, i. e. a *tabret*, or *drum*. Now in the place where they had, notwithstanding the express prohibition of God, imitated the heathen in this most inhuman idolatry, as well as unnatural murder^a, even there were they to receive the signal marks of divine vengeance, they were to be buried till there was no more place to bury, and then their *carcasses* were to be made meat for the *fouls of heaven*^b. *Naboth* was murdered, that *Ahab* might have his vineyard: but no sooner had he taken possession of it, but he is met by *Elijah* the *Tishbite*, with a *Thus saith the Lord*, *In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine*^c. Nay, sometimes those very members of the body, which have been employed

^a Deut. xviii. 10. compare chap. xii. 31. ^b Jer. vii. 31, 32. ^c 1 King. xxi. 19, compare 2 King. ix. 26.

ployed in sinful practices, have received the visible strokes of divine justice. *Jeroboam* puts forth his hand against the faithful prophet ; but it is dried up, so that he cannot pull it in again ^k. It is said of *Henry IV. of France*, that he was a prince of excellent parts and accomplishments; and attended with marvellous success, while he owned the truths of Christ : but he renounced the faith, and turned apostate for fear of danger ; and soon after, he was stabbed in the mouth by a *Jesuit*. Whereupon, a protestant gentleman used this freedom with him, “ *Sir, says he, you have denied God and his truth with your mouth, and he has given you there a stroke ; take heed you deny him not also with your heart, lest the next stroke be there ;* ” which accordingly fell out, for being, at last so left of God, as to become a cordial papist, he was stabbed by a bloody villain, one *Raviliac*, who supposed him to be a *Hugonat*. And *Du Serres*, his own historiographer, saith, “ *it was through the very heart !* ” To observe how exactly men’s calamities have often comported with their crimes, is enough to convince the most besotted Atheist of the being, and providence of God.

THE just God has made some of all sorts of the most daring sinners, to be in this

C 4 world

world the apparent monuments of his justice and wrath ; but has he not set the most signal and frequent marks of his displeasure upon them, who either have been the professed enemies of his people, or have sided with those that were such ^m? Sharp persecutions which tear the *people* of God in pieces, have fuller vials of judgments here, than vollies of other sins which rend the glory of his *name*. God was not only angry with the *Edomites*, for *violence against their brother Jacob*, for which he threatens *shame* should *cover* them, and they should be *cut off for ever*, Obadiah, verse 9, 10, &c. but also, because they *stood on the other side, in the day that strangers carried the Jews captives*; they were spectators of their misery, but did not appear for their relief. Yea, they *rejoiced over them in the day of their destruction*, and *laid their hands upon their substance*, i. e. were ready to receive it *in the day of their calamity*, vers. 12, 13. They also very diligently attended *in the cross ways*, *to cut off those few of the Jews that escaped from the Chaldeans*; or *to deliver them up into the hands of their enemies*, that they might be slain. Therefore God threatens them, that *as they did, so it should be done unto them, and their reward should return upon their own head*, vers. 15. and that *Jerusalem's*

^m *Charn. supl. to vol. ii. p. 69.*

rusalem's bitter cup should pass over to the daughter of Edom, and she should be drunken, and make herself nakedⁿ. And these awful threatenings were, not long after, punctually fulfilled.

AUTHENTICK histories furnish us with many such surprising instances ; which shew how exactly the judgments of God upon his enemies, have answered the evils they have been guilty of towards his saints ; so that in them the dimmest eyes, unless wilfully blind, may plainly read, not only that God is just in himself ; but also, that he governs the affairs of this world, according to the strictest rules of righteousness. Thus, at some times, when inhuman wretches have acted their barbarous cruelty on any part, or member of the bodies of the saints ; the same, by the just retribution of providence, has been acted over upon themselves.

IN the reign of king *Henry VIII.* one *Adam Damlip*, alias *George Bucker*, a sincere preacher of God's word, suffered at *Calais* ; his greatest enemy was one *Sir Ralph Ellerken*, who, at the time of his execution, said, and swore, *he would not go from the place, till he saw his heart out* : but in a little time after, the said *Sir Ralph* was slain in a skirmish between the *French* and *English* at *Bullogn* ; and his enemies stript him

him naked, cut off his privy members, and pulled his heart out of his body ; which cruelty they used to none other of the company : and therefore, this circumstance may be justly looked upon as the righteous judgment of God upon him, who so much desired to see *Damlip's* heart.

Also the very members of the bodies of those vile creatures, which have been employed in the most savage wickedness, have received such visible strokes of Divine vengeance, as fully confirm the doctrine of Divine providence. The idolaters in the emperor Julian's time, did not only persecute and put to death *Cyrillus*, a deacon of *Heliopolis* ; but they eat his liver with bread, as if it had been the sweetest morsel ; but the all-seeing eye of a just God took a special notice of this horrid villainy, and his righteous hand soon revenged it : for their teeth which chewed this unnatural food, fell all out of their heads ; and their tongues wherewith they tasted it, rotted and consumed to nothing ; yea their eyes wherewith they beheld it failed, and they became blind : " and thus were they all served, " faith my *author*, not one excepted, bearing justly the marks of God's wrath, for " so unnatural a deed ." And how often has God struck those men dumb who have been

been witnesses against his servants, or have unjustly condemned them, or those who have endeavoured to stop the mouths of his ministers? Archbishop *Arundel's* tongue was so smitten, while giving sentence against the lord *Cobham*, that he could neither swallow nor speak, but died before him ^{P.}

NAV sometimes the very instruments of cruelty, by which wicked men have designed to put a period to the lives of the godly, have been justly employed in the hand of providence, for the righteous execution of those that purposed to use them unrighteously. Pope *Hildebrand* hires a person to murder *Henry IV.* emperor of *Germany*, which he was to do as he was at prayers, by throwing a stone upon him from the place directly over him; but as the person moved the stone to do this horrid act, he brake the plank he stood upon, and fell down, the stone falling on himself; and so he was killed by the same stone with which he designed to kill the emperor, who remained safe. All these instances fully prove, that *the Lord rewards the doers of evil according to their wickedness*^q; and, in them, we may, with our eyes, behold and see the reward of the wicked^r.

NEITHER is the special and wonderful

^P *Fox*, vol iii. p. 960. ^q 2 Sam. iii. 39. ^r Psal. xci. 8.

ful providence of God less evident, from the protections, deliverances, and supplies, which have attended good men in their various wants, dangers, and distresses; some of which have not only been above and beyond, but contrary to the course of nature. Instances of this kind have been, by the same providence, carefully preserved, and transmitted down from one age to another. Who is there that has not read, or heard, that the waters of the *Red-Sea* divided, and stood up like *a wall* on each side, that *Israel* might pass between *on dry ground*? And is it not known to all who credit the oracles of God, how he fed them with *manna* in the wilderness, and for forty years suffered not *their raiment to wax old*? And that when their time to enter into *Canaan* was come, though *Jordan* then overflowed its banks, yet as soon as the feet of the priests, that bare the ark of the Lord, dipped in the brim of the water, the waters *rose up like an heap on the one side*, and were *cut off on the other*, and the people had both a wonderful and safe passage into the land of Promise? Nor is it less wonderful that, when they came thither, the *sun* and the *moon* brake the courses they had constantly kept from the creation of the world, and *stood still* to give them the opportunity of a compleat victory over their enemies.

MORE-

MOREOVER, Divine Providence has not only, many times, interposed in a very wonderful manner, in the behalf of good people in general, but in the signal appearances of God for some of them in particular. *Moses* was, from his youth, a darling of providence ; and the whole series of his life was attended with bright proofs of the special favour of heaven : he left all the treasures of *Egypt* for the sake of religion, and yet brought *Israel* up from thence enriched with *Egyptian* treasures : this excellent person despised the crown of *Egypt*, for the sake of a good conscience ; and he was made, by the Supreme Majesty, *a God to Pharaoh*^f : nay, he had a far greater honour than that conferred on him ; for *God himself spake to him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend*^t. And what singular manifestations of the divine glory, and familiar discoveries of the will of God, had he in mount *Sinai* ; where, for forty days and nights, he remained without the ordinary supports of life ? an illustrious evidence of the truth of that blessed declaration, that *man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord*^u. To this instance of *Moses*, I might add that of *Elijah*, who, though he lived on earth, and entered

^f Exod. vii. 1. ^t Exod. xxxiii. 11. ^u Deut. viii. 3.

entered into heaven, long after the law-giver of *Israel*; yet he was his bright companion in attending on the blessed Redeemer, at his transfiguration on the mount. And the preservation of this courageous man of God, affords us a remarkable proof, not only of the existence of a Deity; but also that his powerful, and watchful providence extends from the angels to the ravens; nor is it easy to determine which was most wonderful, either that the hungry ravens should be his constant caterers, and *bring him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening*^w, while perhaps they wanted for themselves, and their young; or that *the cake*, to which the *angel* invited him, should strengthen him so as that he should be able to *travel for forty days together, until he came to Horeb*, the mount of God, without any other sustenance^x. How conspicuous also is the divine interposition, in the preservation of *Daniel* in the lion's den; and the three pious worthies in the fiery furnace? It was as natural for the lions to tear and devour, as it was for the fire to scorch and consume; but both comply with the prohibition of the God of nature; and thus in their kind, honour their Creator, in that they do no harm to his servants. The body of *Poly-carpe*, it is said, could not be consumed by

the

^w 1 King. xvii. 6. ^x chap. xix. 8.

the fire, which his bloody persecutors kindled, but it stood like a wall round about him. And it is well known, that though the flames burnt blessed *Baynham*, yet it was without torment to him; and there is good ground to believe, that no man ever died with more ease; for when his legs were half consumed, he cried out, “ *O ye Papists, ye look for miracles, here ye may see one; for in this fire I feel no more pain, than if I were in a bed of down, and it is to me a bed of roses.*” Thus we see God sometimes *cloaths his adversaries with shame*, and they are made to *cover themselves with their own confusion as with a mantle*; while he visibly stands *at the right-hand*² of his people to save them, and to shew his power, and the influence of his providence, over every thing, in their favour.

IT may also be observed, that so far above, and even contrary to nature, have the brute creatures sometimes acted, as must evidently prove, they were guided by the sovereign hand of Divine Providence. The *Philistines* were not so irrational as to imagine, if two milch kine, on whom no yoke ever came, did readily forsake their stalls and their calves, and orderly draw the cart, wherein the ark of God was, taking the direct way to *Bethshemesh*³, that this could be all owing to chance,

² Psal. cix. 29. ³ Psal. xvi. 8. ² 1 Sam. vi. 12.

chance, or accident: though, what is there that seems to us more casual, than the motion of two heifers unaccustomed to the yoke? And yet, by this instance, we see what visible discoveries God has been pleased to give of the certainty of his holy Providence: he sometimes makes even those things that seem most contingent, evidently prove that there is nothing so^b.

THE special hand of God in human affairs has been also manifested, in the method, so successfully used in former times, for deciding doubtful and important cases, by *casting of lots*: for when a just occasion has occurred, and solemn application has, in this way, been made to that God, who only can give a perfect lot^c, we find that first, the *tribe* has been taken from among all the tribes, then the *family*, then the *household*, and at last, the very *person*, who was to be advanced, or punished. Now why did the lot fall upon *Achan*, among the household of *Zabdi*, but because he was the very man that had sinned? Or why upon *Saul*, rather than any other of the tribe of *Benjamin*, but because he was the person, whom the *Lord had chosen* to be king over *Israel*^d? Or can there any natural cause be ascribed why the lot should fall

^b 1 King. xxii. 34. ^c 1 Sam. xiv. 41. ^d 1 Sam. x. 24.

fall upon *Jonah*, rather than upon any of the mariners? Can there any other reason indeed be assigned for it, than that it was owing to his disobedience, that God had brought them all into such distress? And thus therefore, as the event of this practice is, as to us, one of the most precarious, and uncertain things in the whole world, we must say with *Solomon*, *the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord*^e. And shall we ascribe unto him the ordering, and *disposing* of so minute a matter, as that of the *lot*, when *cast into the lap*; and yet doubt of his absolute superintendency, and universal government of heaven and earth, and all that is therein? No certainly—but as the splendid glory of God's creating power and wisdom, are visible in the *things that do appear*, so the *speech* of every *day*, and the *language* of every *night*^f, celebrate the high praises of that powerful, constant, and perfect providence, that supports and governs all persons, and things. *The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all*^g, and therefore, *bless the Lord all his works, in all places of his dominion*^h.

To all these things I might add, that the certainty, perfection and glory of Divine

D

Pro-

^e *Prov. xvi. 33.* ^f *Psal. xix. 2.* ^g *Psal. ciii.*
^{19.} ^h *vers. 22.*

Providence is apparent, from the exact accomplishment of sacred predictions, even in the most unlikely, and minute events and circumstances. *Elisha* prophesieth of great plenty in *Samaria*, at a time, when the thing seemed very improbable, and the unbelieving Lord could scarce think it possibleⁱ: but his death proves the truth of that prediction, to which he could give no credit. *Joshua*, by divine inspiration, pronounces a curse on that person, whosoever he were, who should rebuild *Jericho*; and foretels, that he should *lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and set up the gates in his youngest son*: and above five hundred years after, this city, whose desolations were, to remain as a lasting monument of the indignation of God against idolatry, was built by *Hiel the Bethelite: and he laid the foundation thereof in the death of Abiram*, his first-born, *and set up the gates in the death of Segub his youngest son*^k. When *Ahab*'s covetousness had produced the murder of *Naboth*, the righteous God threatens, that *in the very place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, they should lick the blood of Ahab*: and the event answers, both as to *Ahab*'s person, and his son *Jehoram*^l. To add no more in confirmation of this point,

ⁱ 2 King. vii. 19. ^k Josh. vi. 26. compare with
1 King. xvi. 34. ^l Compare 1 King. xxi. 19.
with chap. xxii. 38. and 2 King. ix. 26.

point, it is very plain, that the accomplishment of the prophecies of the old testament, takes up a great part of the new: so that we may evidently see the truth of what the prophet saith, *viz.* that *the Lord confirmeth the words of his servants, and performeth the counsel of his messengers*^m. But I proceed to a second proposition; *viz.*

PROP. II. *That the great end of God, in upholding and governing the world, and in all he does therein, is his own glory, and the good of his people.*

As it is impossible for a wise agent to act without proposing an end; so it is most certain, he that is infinitely perfect in wisdom, must propose the highest and most excellent ends, in all he does: and what can that be, but his own glory? As God made nothing in vain, so he does nothing without an end and design. We may as well suppose, that God made something he knows not why, as that he does any thing he knows not wherefore; though either of these suppositions are as irrational, as they are blasphemous: for it draws a veil upon the absolute perfection of the divine Being, to suppose that he ever did, or ever will do any thing in vain. But as he made all things at first for himself; i. e. for his own glory; so, to this end, he will never cease

D 2

to

^m *Isai. xliv. 26.*

to guide and over-rule every thing that he has made. It is this he designs, in his various dispensations towards men, in favouring and blessing some, and in punishing and destroying others. The Lord loved his people *Israel*, and was *nigh to them*, he loaded them with benefits, and, for their sakes, he wrought many wonderful things; and his end was, *to make himself a name of greatness and terribleness*ⁿ. And to the same purpose did he plague *Pharaoh*, with variety of strange and dreadful judgments^o. Nor is this the end of God, only with respect to such things, as are done more immediately by his own hand; but also in what he employs instruments, yea, in what he suffers wicked men, or devils to do. Ungodly men execute his counsel, and fulfil his pleasure, though they know it not. And though Satan be the implacable enemy of God's glory; and his evil nature inclines him, with unwearyed industry, to oppose its advancement; yet, by the superior and irresistible arm of the Almighty, his malice and rage is often remarkably over-ruled, and made subservient to that excellent end, to which he is most averse. When he plundered *Job* of his substance, murdered his children with a tempest, and smote his body

ⁿ 2 Sam. vii. 23. 1 Chron. xvii. 21. ^o Exod. ix. 16.

bôdy all over with boils, how far was he from designing, to make him a mirror of patience to all succeeding generations? *But ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord^p.* Innumerable instances might be given, wherein both Satan, and wicked men, (his emissaries and vassals) have been employed in the hand of sovereign providence, to bring to pass those events, which are utterly inconsistent with the nature, either of the one, or of the other to propose. But it is abundantly sufficient, to this purpose, to mention that of the salvation of men, by the bloody and accursed death of the meek and spotless Son of God^q, and the spreading of the gospel, by the persecution of the saints^r.

IT is also given to *Jesus Christ*, as mediator, *to be head over all things to the church^s*, i. e. to rule and govern all the affairs of the whole world, as he, in his perfect wisdom, shall see most conducive, and subservient, to their real advantage and welfare, who are his mystical body. And in every thing that can befall them, he, who never fails to accomplish all his purposes, designs their good; and though often their faith is too weak for them to think so; yet *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts^t*. The children of

D 3

Israel,

^p Jam. v. 11. ^q Acts ii. 23. ^r Acts viii.
4. and xi. 19. ^s Eph. i. 22. ^t Isai. lv. 8.

Israel, when led a journey of forty years through a great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions, and where there were many other inconveniences, were very prone to entertain hard thoughts of God, as well as of Moses his servant; though the gracious end of God, in all his dealings with them, was to humble them, and prove them, and do them good in their latter end^u. Perhaps also the pious persons, who were first carried captives out of their native land, the land of Promise, were scarcely able to believe, that God *sent them into the land of the Chaldeans, for their good.* But though our faith fail, *he abideth faithful, who has assured us, that the thoughts he thinks towards us, are thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give us an expected end^w.* And this leads me to a third proposition,

PROP. III. *That, whatever comes to pass, or is done under the sun, that God, to whose providence it must be ascribed, can certainly make it effectual, not only to his own glory, but also to the real profit, and advantage of his people.*

We have already shewed, that these are the ends the wise and perfect God proposes, in whatsoever he does in the world; and we can no more doubt of his ability to attain

^u Deut. viii. 15, 16. and vers. 2. ^w Jer. xxix. 11.

tain the ends he has in view, than of his being *God over all*; since all tolerable conceptions of the nature of a Deity, must necessarily include his being almighty. He that is infinite in his essence, can never be limited in his power; neither can any, I think, be so stupid, and irrational, as to acknowledge God to be omniscient in his understanding to discern, perfect in his wisdom to contrive, absolute in his will to determine; and yet doubt, whether he be infinite in his power to execute his wise and holy resolves. Even an heathen could say, *if you know God, you know that he can do all things.* Surely he who is styled the *Almighty*, no less than seventy times, in the Holy Bible, can never be nonplussed with any difficulty, nor be driven to any straits; neither does he ever want power or skill to effect his gracious purposes, and do his people good, even by those things, which seem to make most against them: which may be concluded, not only from the consideration of that omnipotent power, which is one of the essential properties and perfections of God; but it may be also easily collected from the many instances, in which he has magnified his power, in making those persons the effectual instruments of his people's good, who have been the farthest off from any such design; and those things

to contribute to it, which have naturally had a direct contrary tendency. The precious life of the apostle *Paul*, was saved by the resolution of *Festus*; who, for any thing that appears from the history, might be as really unacquainted with his danger, as he was a stranger to his worth. This *Roman* governor, being come to *Jerusalem*, the blood-thirsty *Jews* desire of him, as a special favour, that *Paul* might be sent from *Cesarea* to *Jerusalem*, for this secret reason, that they might murder him by the way. *Festus* is determined, by his invisible hand, no doubt, who sways his scepter in the hearts of men, that *Paul* should not come to him, nor them at *Jerusalem*; but that himself would shortly go to *Paul* at *Cesarea*; and, by this means, the apostle is protected from their bloody hands, to whose malice and cruelty he might, otherwise have fallen a grateful sacrifice ².

THEY that have least real regard for God's people, are often the instruments providence uses for their salvation. When *Pharaoh*'s daughter embraced and adopted the forlorn infant, how far was she from intending to nurse up, either a chosen vessel for the Lord, or a captain and a saviour for the poor enslaved *Israelites*? Had there not been a more watchful eye over *Moses*, than that

² *Acts xxv. 2, &c.*

that of his sister, the brink of the river had indeed been the brink of ruin: but when *bis father and mother must forsake him*, they committed him to that God, who took care of him^y; and by the special direction of whose providence, no doubt, it was, that *Pharaob's* daughter came, at that time, to the very place, where, but a little before, those affectionate parents had parted with their condemned babe. And how observable is the divine hand, in determining the heart of this *Egyptian* princess, to take into her special care one, whom she could not but know her father had doomed to die? Nor is it less observable, that *Pharaob* should suffer his daughter to become the mother of a *Hebrew* child; especially, if we may credit what *Josephus* relates, *viz.* that *Pharaob* was warned by one of his priests, that about this time there should arise one, who should work much harm to the *Egyptians*, and greatly exalt the *Israelites*; which was one occasion of the bloody edict for the murdering of their males^z.

FROM such instances as these, of which many might be produced, it is very evident, that many such persons are over-ruled by the divine hand, and their actions directed by the special providence of God, for the welfare and happiness of his people, who
are

^y Psal. xxvii. 10. ^z Joseph. lib. ii. p. 5.

are the farthest from designing them any good. The Lord chastised an hypocritical nation by by the *Affyrian*, who was the rod of his anger; howbeit the *Affyrian* meant not so, neither did his heart think so; but it was in his heart to cut off and destroy nations not a few^a.

WHEN men have been big with evil purposes against the despised people of God, and in pain to bring them forth, even then the steps which they have taken, have often been made apparently subservient to the advantage of those, whose ruin they have aimed at. *Joseph*'s cruel and unnatural brethren hate him, conspire against him, and sell him for a slave; and yet all this, together with the base, unjust accusation of his vicious mistress, make way for his being lord of *Egypt*, where, according to his own prophecies, and God's gracious purpose, *the sun, and the moon, and the eleven stars, make obeisance to him*^b.

THE like may be observed concerning *Mordecai*, and the church of God in his time; the scheme of whose speedy destruction was contrived and pursued by *Haman*, their proud and cruel enemy; but that just and gracious Lord, who ruleth over all, baffles and confounds his wicked purposes, and attempts; and causes all his pride

^a *Isai. x. 5, 6, 7.* ^b *Gen. xxxvii. 9.*

pride and rage to issue, not only in the shameful loss of his own life, but also in the advancement of *Mordecai*, the object of his most inveterate hatred, and the salvation of the *Jews*, the people he had destined to destruction, and with whose bloody massacre he hoped shortly to satiate his malice ^c. The visible hand of God in this matter, may be observed in such remarks as these, *First*, that after three days spent in fasting, to which, no doubt, were joined solemn and fervent prayers, *Esther*, the pious queen, ventures her life, and goes to the king, though it was *not according to law*, to address him for the lives of her people; and she finds favour in his eyes, though she had been thirty days absent from him, before that time. *Secondly*, that the next night after the king had been at *Esther's* banquet, he could not sleep. Again, *Thirdly*, that it then should come in his mind, to have the book of the records of the chronicles read before him. And, *Fourthly*, that, that part should be then read, that gave account of loyal and faithful *Mordecai's* being the instrument of saving the king's life. As also, *Fifthly*, that this great man should be immediately so influenced, by principles of justice and gratitude, as to enquire diligently what honourable reward had been conferred

on

^c *Esther* iii. 13.

on *Mordecai*, for this; and that, finding he had met with the common treatment of the most useful men, *viz.* to be neglected and forgot, he should immediately resolve to confer upon him all the dignity due to the man, *whom the king delighted to honour*.

AGAIN, it is well worthy of observation, that, when wicked men have most diligently combined their powers, and bent them with the greatest fury against the church of Christ; when they have, by violent persecution, scattered the people of God, and seperated them from one another, as well as driven them from their several habitations, and families; this has been made effectual for the increase of their number, the propagation of the truth they profess, and the growth of grace and comfort in their own souls. When *Saul made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women to prison*, what was the consequence? Why the disciples being scattered abroad, go *every where preaching the gospel*^d. It was then, *Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ to them*; and the people attentively heard him, believed, and were baptized, and there was great joy in that city^e. Also, they which are scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Pernice,

^d *Acts viii. 3, 4.*

^e *vers. 5—12.*

nicē, and Cyprus, and Antioch ; and some of them being, by birth, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, though others preached to none but the Jews only ; yet, when they came to Antioch, they spake unto the Grecians there, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them ; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord^f. So that the violent persecution, which scattered the saints at Jerusalem, issues, you see, in the spreading the gospel among the Grecians, and the gathering a famous church of Gentile believers, at Antioch. God often makes the tears and sufferings of his servants, while living, as well as the blood of his martyrs when dead, the seed of the church : and he often builds up his Zion by those who seek to *raise her to the ground* ; and makes the fury and cruelty of ravening wolves, subeventient to the increase of that blessed, though little flock, to whom it is his good pleasure to give the kingdom. But I proceed to observe,

PROP. IV. *That such is the love of God to his people, and such his faithfulness to his promises, that as he can, so he certainly will, make all his providences, some way or other, effectual for their profit and advantage.*

THAT

^f Acts xi. 19, 20, 21.

THAT God can do his people good by all occurrences, I hope has been fully evinced under the foregoing *proposition*. But many, who dare not question his power, are too apt to doubt of his will, and also to neglect to exercise faith in his promises; therefore we add, his love to his children is such, as will always engage him to exert the arm of his omnipotency on their behalf, and make every thing productive of their welfare, or subservient to it; for his good will, and tender pity towards them, is of equal extent with his power to relieve them: neither need we produce any more instances, either of the former, or the latter, since the God of love and power, has so illustriously displayed both, in the gift of his only begotten son for us, and his blessed spirit to us. For how justly may we conclude with the holy apostle, that *since he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, he will, with him, also freely give us all things*⁸. And were this amazing instance of divine love more considered, and better understood, it would lead us more steadily to confide in the never-failing goodness and kindness of our heavenly Father. Many earthly parents have given such pledges of their paternal affections, that their children have, with great reason, made

no

⁸ Rom. viii. 32.

no doubt but they would do them any good within their power. Why let it then be considered, that the love of our gracious God, and Father in Christ, doth as far surpass all other love, as his power does all other power; and he has given such unparalleled proofs of it, as justly astonish both men and angels. And how safely then may those he has adopted, confide in him to do them good, by all his dispensations; which is a blessing his love has disposed him to promise; and of which his unchangeable faithfulness secures the performance? *We know*, saith the Apostle, *that all things work together for good, to them that love God*^h. He does not speak of it as a matter of uncertain conjecture; but as that concerning which he had no doubt: *we know*: what did he know? why not only that some things, but, *all things work for their good that love God*; even the darkest providences, the most dreadful temptations, and fiery trials, yea those things which, to us, seem most opposite to our happiness, shall *work for our good*: but how? not separately or apart, but conjointly, or *together*. Divine providences are medicinal: now take certain simples alone, and they may prove poison, rather than phyfick: but let them be compounded, according to the direction

of

^h Rom. viii. 28.

of a skilful physician, and they are eminently useful. Though some of God's ways, for a time, may seem contrary to his promises, and our comfort; yet, in the end, they will *all* appear to be *mercy and truth*¹. That God, who is faithful, *will remember his covenant*, and never *turn away from his people to do them good*²; for *he keepeth truth for ever*, and *his promise fails not from generation to generation*¹. He ever has been, and ever will be, mindful of their real interest, who desire principally to mind his honour: they need not fear his leaving them at any time, or place, nor failing to produce their profit by every providence: for as his perfect wisdom always proposes the best measures; so his omnipotent power never fails to make the same the same effectual: as he certainly knows what is best for his saints; so he certainly can, without any toil or difficulty, direct, and over-rule all things for his own glory, and their real good. And they that, under the most staggering providences, do most steadily confide in the power of God, and have the most raised expectations from his immense goodness, are usually favoured with the brightest evidences of his paternal pity, and immutable faithfulness. Though the faithfulness of

of God does not depend on our faith ; for *if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, and cannot deny himself*^m : he is a *God that cannot lie*ⁿ : truth is such an essential property of his nature, that it is most horrid blasphemy, once to suppose it possible for him to fall short of his word. And it deserves our serious consideration, which dis- honour God most ; they who do not believe the doctrine of God's providence ; or they who doubt whether he can, or will conduct all affairs for the good of his ser- vants, according to the promises of his word : for it is as rational to conclude that the first and most perfect Being must govern all things well ; as it is to suppose that he is the upholder and governor of all things, or of any thing at all. And the holy scripture does not more plainly declare the doctrine of providence, than it does posi- tively assert their special interest therein, and their constant and certain advantage thereby, who are the children and servants of the living God. To which I add,

PROP. V. *That though the great Governor of the universe manages all things for the good and welfare of his people ; yet some of the dispensations of his wise and holy provi-*

E dence

^m 2 Tim. ii. 13. ⁿ Tit. i. 2.

dence are, especially to us, very dark, mysterious, and incomprehensible.

The judgments of God are a great deep; so deep, that the most diligent scholars in Christ's school, may be many years in learning the design of God in them; or how to reconcile the afflictions, with which they are exercised, to his gracious and faithful promises. The righteous dispensations of the wise and absolute Sovereign of heaven and earth, have posed and staggered those whose graces have been most eminent, and whose names are most remarkably celebrated in sacred writ; such as *Jacob, Job, David, Jeremiah, &c.* The divine conduct is indeed always perfect, but very often, to us, so obscure, and intricate, that what he does, we know not now, though we may hope to know hereafter: his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his foot-steps are not known^o; and, in many instances, can be no more traced by us, than the way of an eagle in the air, or of a ship in the midst of the sea^p. The most inquisitive observers of the divine conduct, may often say, with *Job*, lo, he goeth by us, and we see him not; he passeth on also, and we perceive him not^q; or with *Zophar*, the secrets of wisdom are double to that which we know; and we cannot, by searching

• Psal. lxxvii. 19. ^p Job xxx. 19. ^q chap. ix. 11.

searching, find out the Almighty to perfection^r. When the times have been cloudy and dark, and the children of God have greatly longed for some signal appearance of their heavenly Father, on their behalf, and in behalf of his own glory, they have often been ready to cry out, *behold, we go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him^f.* Most christians have observed, or may observe, such providences attending the church of God in general, and many of his most eminent servants in particular, as are very mysterious, and hard to be understood: and various instances of this kind may be collected from the holy scriptures, and other credible accounts of the Lord's dealing with his people; amongst which, these that follow are not unworthy of our special notice. As,

FIRST, When God has given to some men singular grounds to expect the most remarkable blessings, and distinguishing favours of his providence, that after all this, these persons should meet with a long series of bitter troubles, and sometimes uncommon afflictions.

Joseph is assured by the Lord, once and again, that he should be advanced above

E 2

his

^r Job. xi. 6, 7. ^f chap. xxiii. 8, 9.

his brethren: but under how many dark, and distressing circumstances, does this pious young man pass, e'er he receives the blessings promised him, or possesses the honours God had appointed for him? Let us view these dark providences a little particularly. And,

FIRST, then, his unrighteous brethren strip themselves of natural affection, and *hate him, and cannot speak peaceably unto him*¹. And though, it is probable, they knew he did not connive at their wickedness, but *brought unto his father their evil report*²; yet Jacob's very great and peculiar affection to him, together with the discoveries he himself made of the advancement God had designed for him, seem to have been the things which principally inflamed their breasts with rage against him: and it must needs be a very trying exercise to him, to observe such malice and hatred prevailing in the hearts of his own flesh and blood, as determines them at once to oppose God's kind purposes, and his future prosperity. And therefore,

SECONDLY, when Joseph (pursuant to the order of his good old father) comes to them, to enquire after their welfare, these cruel brethren, *shall I say?* or rather these unnatural monsters, conspire against him to slay

¹ Gen xxxvii. 4.

² ver. 2.

slay him, and resolve to cover the nefarious act with a premeditated lie. But,

THIRDLY, being diverted from imbruining their hands, immediately, in his blood by *Reuben*, whose conscience was more tender than that of the rest, they strip him of his clothes, and cast him into a pit: thus he is stript of his coat of divers colours by his own brethren, who is to be dignified with royal robes by a foreign prince; and his being cast into a pit in *Dothan*, precedes, and makes way for his accession to the throne of *Egypt*. *Lo these are parts of his ways*^w!

FOURTHLY, we next find *Joseph* sold to a company of *Ishmaelites*, and he is, by them carried down to *Egypt*, as a slave, who was to reign there as a king. But what bitter sorrows, think you, tortured his tender breast, while he was thus carried, by mercenary pagans, from his native country, from the land of Promise, into a strange land; thus forced to leave his godly, aged, indulgent father *Jacob*, and his dearly-beloved brother *Benjamin*, and that, perhaps, without any hopes of seeing them any more in this world? Yea, how deeply may we suppose his heart was wounded, from an apprehension of the distress, in which his tender father would be involved,

on account of his absence ; and for fear the good old man should draw such bitter conclusions as would overwhelm him with grief, and bring his *grey hairs with sorrow to the grave*? And no doubt but the thoughts of being deprived of the publick worship of that God, whom, it is evident, he conscientiously feared, and that he might now no more join in the sweet and heavenly devotions, nor hear the wholesome and savory instructions of his renowned father, did very much add to the deep distres, and bitter anguish of his spirit, which increases upon him while in *Egypt*. For,

FIFTHLY, though he was eminent for his chastity and holiness ; and though he was strictly faithful, and greatly prosperous too in the capacity of a servant ; yet these advantages could not protect him from the vile slander of his wanton mistress^x, nor the unjust displeasure of his too credulous master : the former, because she could not prevail with him, to comply with her unlawful inclinations and wicked desires, falsely charges him with making such attempts, as his righteous soul abhorred ; by which she does not only take away his good name, but exposes his life to great danger : for his master's power to take it away is not to be questioned ; and *jealousy is as cruel as the*

^x Gen. xxxix. 1, &c.

the grave^y. "And that he was not hereupon put to death, must be ascribed to the special watchfulness, and careful providence of that God, in whose hands all *our times* are. However, hereupon we find he is not only turned out of *Potiphar's* house, but cast into prison, yea, into a dungeon, *where his feet are burst with fetters of iron*^z. And,

SIXTHLY, when there, he is most ungratefully forgotten by *Pharaob's* butler, who, of all men, should have most affectionately remembred *Joseph*, since he had so earnestly intreated, and so well deserved his friendship. But how common a thing is it for persons, while in the enjoyment of the pleasures and honours of a court, to forget those who have been their kindest friends, and chief supports, while exposed to poverty and disgrace? From all these things then we may observe, that this holy man, who had devoted his youthful days to the service of his great Creator, and from whom he had received the clearest indications, and most solid grounds to expect the most evident discoveries of providential care, and goodness; yet did, for thirteen years, or thereabouts, meet with a series of very dark and gloomy dispensations. Neither is this a singular case, for we often find that others, who have been the peculiar favourites

E 4 of

^y Cant. viii. 6. ^z Psal. cv. 18.

of heaven, have been subjected to like circumstances of difficulty and affliction, with him.

Moses, who was to be the captain of the Lord's host, first flies for his life, and is afterwards a stranger in a strange land. God promises *Canaan* to the seed of *Abraham*, his friend; but they must pass through a sojourning state for four hundred and thirty years, before they possess it^a; about one half of which time they were in the land of *Egypt*, and, for the last hundred years (I suppose at least) under cruel bondage^b. And when the Lord brought them thence, with an outstretched arm, he led them, for forty years, in a howling wilderness; and they that were the heirs of a *land flowing with milk and honey*, were obliged for a long time to drink the *waters of Marah*.

WHEN God had promised the kingdom to *David*, and *Samuel* had anointed him; yet before the Lord's anointed comes to the throne of *Israel*, he passes through such great hazards, and distressing circumstances, that he even despairs of his life, and, *in his haste*, cries out, *all men are liars*^c. He whom God had chosen to be the shepherd of *Israel*, is in danger of losing his life by the bloody hands of *Saul*; for he cast a javelin

^a Exod. xii. 40. ^b See *Willet's Hexapla*. on Exod. xii. 40. ^c Psal. cxvi. 11.

javelin at him twice^d; after which, he exposes him to the uncircumcised *Philistines*, hoping their hands might be upon him^e. All this being ineffectual, *Saul* speaks to *Jonathan* his son, and to all his servants, that they would kill *David*; but *Jonathan*, instead of complying with his father's cruel and bloody purpose, timely informs *David* of his danger, and, in a lively manner, lays before *Saul* the heinous and aggravated nature of his sin^f; which though it seemed to have a good effect upon him at the time, yet the influence of it was soon over; for he again seeks to give *David* a mortal wound, which divine providence prevented, by guiding the javelin, he cast at him, into the wall^g. He then hopes to make *David*'s bed his grave, and sends messengers to his house, to watch for him, and slay him there; but they find nothing but his image; he himself is fled into the bosom of the good old prophet *Samuel*^h. But this did not put an end to his danger; *Saul* still hunts for his life: whereupon *David* flies to *Achish* the king of *Gath*ⁱ, and in his journey coming to *Nob*, and, wanting bread, he calls on *Abimelech* the priest, who, because of his necessity, gave him *sacred* bread, and furnished him

^d 1 Sam. xviii. 11. ^e vers. 25. ^f 1 Sam. chap. xix. ^g vers. 10. ^h vers. 14—18.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxi.

him also with the same sword, with which he had killed *Goliab*. But *Abimelecb*'s kind and innocent conduct is attended with most tragical and bloody consequences; for *Doeg* the *Edomite*, gladly embracing the office of a wicked informer, discovers the matter to *Saul*; and, according to the genius of men of that character, he does not represent the thing in its true light, but so as might most exasperate the king against the priests of the Lord; which he accomplishes to such a degree, that *Saul* sentences *four-score and five persons, that wore a linen ephod*, to immediate death. But, to execute this most unrighteous and dreadful sentence, there was no man cruel enough among all the servants of *Saul*; therefore *Doeg*, the malicious informer, becomes the barbarous executioner, and *smites the priests, and their city, men, women, and children, oxen, and asses, with the edge of the sword*^k. The very reading of this uncommon tragedy, may deeply affect all that have a becoming regard to sacred things, or any bowels of compassion towards their fellow-creatures; and therefore, the hearing of it, we may well suppose, must deeply wound the tender breast of holy *David*, who had such a distinguishing respect for the ministers of the Lord, especially, when he considered, that
it

^k Chap. xxii. 18, 19.

it was on his account, that so many sacred persons suffered so cruel, and immature a death¹. When he is at *Gath*, his dangers and fears are such, as cause him to change his behaviour, and feign himself mad: though he obtained but little the more safety, for exposing himself as senseless: with king *Abijsb* he finds no protection, he therefore next seeks shelter in the cave *Adullam*^m; and he that was to reign on the throne of *Judah*, takes up his dwelling in a cavern of the earth: thence he marches to the king of *Moab*, to seek protection for his aged parentsⁿ, though he himself had no resting-place; for he abides not in *Moab*, but, pursuant to the advice of the prophet *Gad*, he retires into the land of *Judah*, and comes into the forest of *Hareth*^o: whence he shortly departs, and subdues the enemies of, the afterwards ungrateful, inhabitants of *Keilah*; who, notwithstanding he had been their common saviour, would have delivereded him into the hands of *Saul*, his implacable adversary^p; of which being assured by the Lord, he makes his escape to the mountains, and hides himself in the strongholds that were in the wilderness of *Ziph*, where his good friend *Jonathan* comes to visit him, and, under his great trials,
strengthens

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 22. ^m 1 Sam. xxii. 1. ⁿ vers. 3.
 • vers. 5. ^p 1 Sam. xxiii. 12.

strengthens his hands in God^q. But, being betrayed by the *Ziphites*, he takes up his next abode in a rock, in the wilderness of *Maon*^r, where *Saul* pursues him, and he was in very great danger: but that providence which had always afforded him protection, appeared in the mount of straits; for when *Saul* had encompassed *David* and his men round about, to take them, there comes a hasty messenger to inform him, that the *Philistines* had invaded the land: and so he was obliged to give over pursuing the life of one man, that he might prevent the death of many^t. Wars with neighbouring nations often prevent enraged and unrighteous princes, from persecuting, and murdering their own loyal subjects. When *Saul* was returned from following the *Philistines*, he takes three thousand chosen men of *Israel*, and seeks *David*, who had secured himself in the strong-holds of *En-gedi*^u; but the Lord protects *David*, and delivers his enemy into his hand; who shewed himself innocent under his greatest sufferings; and righteous, where he had the fairest opportunity of revenge; for he only cut off the skirt of the king's robe^v. But such is *Saul*'s rage, and malice, that it supersedes the fullest proofs of *David*'s loyalty,

^q 1 Sam. xxiii. 14 and 16. ^r verf. 24, 25.
^t verf. 26, 27, 28. ^u 1 Sam. xxiv. 2. ^v verf. 4.

alty, as well as the keenest reprimands of his own conscience; and he hearkens to the *Ziphites*, and again hunts after *David*, in the wilderness of *Ziph*; but is a second time delivered into his hands, whose life he pursued without ceasing, and whom he justly owned to be more righteous than himself^w. But *David*, knowing *Saul* to be fickle and deceitful, and being himself subject to unbelief, and often influenced by slavish fears, at length concludes, there was nothing better for him, than to flee into the land of the *Philistines*; which it can scarcely be thought he could do, without great reluctance, considering his cordial, fervent, and singular love to the people, temple, and ordinances of the Lord his God, of all which he was, in a great measure, deprived, while he dwelt among the uncircumcised inhabitants of *Gath*^x. And though this put an end to all *Saul*'s attempts to take away his life; for, when he heard of his being fled to *Gath*, *he sought no more again for him*^y; yet this did not put an end to *David*'s sorrows: for, after all, we find him in as great distress as ever; the *Amalekites* invade the south, and burn *Ziklag*, the city that *Achish* gave to *David*, and carry away all the women captives, that appertain to *David* and his men; which

^w Chap. xxvi.

^x chap. xxvii. 1.

^y vers. 4.

which caused him, and the people that were with him, to weep, till they had no power to weep^z; yea, so were the people grieved, every one for his sons, and for his daughters, that they spake of stoning David; charging this sad calamity on his ill conduct. But, in the midst of all these distresses, he sought direction from, and encouraged himself in, the Lord his God^a, and whose good time was now come, to take from him his garments of sack-cloth, and cloath him with robes of majesty. Thus after this long and dark night of gloomy providences, the glorious day of prosperity dawns upon David, with his victory over the Amalekites^b. Saul, who had hunted him like a partridge on the mountains, is now himself slain on the mountains of Gilboa^c; and David, of an exile in Ziklag, is made an illustrious prince in Hebron^d. Thus we see the brightest saints, and even those of them, for whom God has designed the greatest blessings of this life, as well as that which is to come, do sometimes, notwithstanding, for many years, meet with an uninterrupted succession of disappointments, and distresses, which frequently very much puzzle, and even stumble themselves and others, until providence, by accomplishing

^z Chap. xxx.^a ver. 6.^b ver. 17—20.^c chap. xxxi,^d 2 Sam. ii.

plishing and perfecting its whole work, hath explained the several parts of it.

BUT, before I proceed, I will here offer an inference or two. And,

(1.) THEN, we should learn from hence, *always to take heed that we do not rashly censure the dispositions of divine providence, relating either to ourselves, or others*: for as the nature of God is incomprehensible, so his works are unsearchable; nor is it indeed any wonder, that the methods taken by his infinite wisdom are too mysterious for us, poor finite, silly mortals, to comprehend, since he knows that to be the right way for our happiness, which, in our apprehensions, often seems the ready way to our ruin. But as the prosperity of wicked men frequently issues in dreadful misery, and the bright sun of all their glory certainly goes down at last in utter darkness; so the many sad exercises, and bitter sorrows, through which good men pass, will, in God's due time, appear to be right ways, chosen by his infinite wisdom, to lead them into the fruition of true happiness. Thus the brightest smiles of providence are often connected with, and do closely succeed, the most daunting and dismal occurrences we meet with in life: and seeing the wisdom of God, in the footsteps of his providence, is *as far above our thoughts*,

thoughts, as the heavens are above the earth^e,
 it becomes us to believe his word, where
 we cannot see his path ; and humbly to
 adore his wisdom, when we cannot trace,
 nor understand his ways ; for our God
 works wonders : and though his ways are
 too wonderful for us, yet there is a beauti-
 ful consistency runs through all his con-
 duct : and as, in our great salvation, he ad-
 vances us to the highest honours, by ex-
 posing his own son to a shameful death ; so,
 in the course of his providence, he often
 makes the greatest miseries productive of
 the sweetest mercies. And since those dis-
 pensations, in which there appears to men
 to be the least wisdom, infinitely transcend
 the most sage counsels, and exact contriv-
 ances, created beings are capable of^f : O
 let us not, at any time, rashly judge, nor
 unadvisedly determine, concerning his ways,
who is a rock, and his work is perfect !

(2.) *LET us learn to wait upon God, in
 the exercise of faith, and patience, though,
 in the course of his Providence, he seems to
 frown, and even to frustrate our hopes and
 expectations.*

PRECIOUS saints may think God's ways
 run counter to his word, and their good
 for a time ; but he will certainly accomplish
 both to his own glory, and their comfort,
 in

^e Psal. ciii. 11. ^f 1 Cor. i. 25. Deut. xxxii. 4.

in the issue ; and they may expect those good things from the kind hand of his providence, that lie far beyond the discovery of their reason, and which they can see no human probability of ever obtaining. For as God many times surprises the wicked with his judgments ; so he frequently does great things for his servants, *which they looked not for*^s. It can scarce be thought, that when *Joseph* was carried down to *Egypt* by the *Ishmaelites*, he expected to be raised to such an exalted station there ; or that he then concluded that the design of providence, in his taking that sorrowful journey, was not only his own advancement, but the preservation of the lives of multitudes, and especially those of his father's family^h. Our gracious God hath both determined, and promised to do us good, by those things which, to us, seem very evil and bitter ; and we ought to believe his word, when we cannot understand his way : yea, we ought to conclude those dispensations of his providence, as the contrivances of his perfect wisdom, most exactly framed for his honour, and our true interest, which, to us, seem most dark and mysterious ; waiting and hoping for some bright and smiling events, to clear up and explain the gloomy scenes, which we have already passed

F through,

^s *Isai.* lxiv. 3.

^h *Gen.* xlv. 5.

through, or are at present under. If God covers himself with clouds and thick darkness, that we cannot behold him; yet, even then, we should hope in his mercyⁱ, submit to the conduct of his wisdom^k, and confide in his unchangeable love and faithfulness^l. But,

SECONDLY, that God should give very desirable blessings to his own covenant-people, in answer to their prayers, and sometimes as a reward for kindness shewed to his servants; and yet suddenly remove those pleasant enjoyments, is another instance of the mysterious, and incomprehensible depths of his holy providence.

WE read of a great and pious woman of *Shunem*^m, a city belonging to the tribe of *Issachar*ⁿ, who shewed a special regard to the prophet *Elisha*, on account of the dignity of his character, and the holiness of his conversation, and therefore she constrains him, at all opportunities, to eat bread at her table, never esteeming it so well furnished, as when the good prophet was her guest; and thinking all this kindness too little, she prevails on her husband to provide, still more suitable, accommodations for this holy man of God; and since retirement was most agreeable to the solemn work;

and

ⁱ Psal. xxxiii. 18, 22. ^k 2 Sam. xv. 26. ^l Psal. cxliii. 1. ^m 2 King. iv. 8. ⁿ Josh. xix. 18.

and heavenly temper of a prophet, a chamber is built for *Elisba* on the wall, where he might always be entertained without incommoding the family, or being himself interrupted by any of the affairs of it. All this being accomplished, the *man of God* is now solicitously concerned to manifest his gratitude to this bountiful and excellent woman; and, upon enquiry, perceiving nothing would be more agreeable, though perhaps nothing less hoped for, than a child, (*for her husband was old*) the prophet having doubtless requested this favour for her of the Lord, and having received an answer from heaven, assures her, that she should become a mother in *Israel*; that she should not only conceive, but bear, bring forth, and joyfully *embrace a son*; which accordingly came to pass, at the time which *Elisba* had foretold. Thus we see she built a chamber for the man of God, and God built up her family. Hitherto the dispensations of the Lord towards her are very bright and clear, she *receives a prophet*, and *gives to him as a prophet*, and hath a *prophet's reward*^o; but how soon is her *harp turned into mourning*, and her *organ into the voice of them that weep*^p? the joy of harvest is, to her, the time of lamenting for an only son. The endearing babe, she had so

F 2

often,

often, with pleasure, embraced in her bosom, is suddenly removed into the cold arms of death: he went out well, in the morning, to the reapers, but is brought home, sick unto death, before noon, and, in very little time, he gives up the ghost, on his tender mother's knees⁴. What bitter distress may we suppose this good woman was now in, when her only son, so lately given her, in answer to the prophet's prayers, lay dead in the prophet's chamber? was it not to her a very dark and sad providence, to have such a sweet and desireable blessing so suddenly snatched away, by the eager and irresistible hands of death? And though, it is probable, she was not without hope that the good prophet *Elisha* might prevail with God to restore her child's life; yet it is evident that her spirit was, for some time, in such bitter anguish, as rendered her incapable to represent her mournful case to him, whom she knew to be her tender and sympathizing friend, and who, on this occasion, proved her effectual comforter. It is indeed true, her weeping did not *endure for a night*, and that her *joy came before the morning*; but yet, I think, it must be owned, that, during those hours her dear babe was placed in the *valley of the shadow of death*, the providence of God towards

wards her, looked with a very dark and gloomy aspect.

To this instance, I may very properly add that of the widow of *Zarephath*, whose kindness to the prophet *Elijah* was so remarkably rewarded, that, when she and her son were at the point of death, and ready to eat their last morsel, their lives were preserved, and provided for by miracle : *the barrel of meal did not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail; but she, and he, and her house, did eat many days*^r. Now when God had thus marvellously preserved the lives of this woman and her son, for the sake of his servant, who sojourned with them, it comes to pass that the young man fell sick, and his sickness was so sore that he died, *for, it is said, there was no breath in him*^s. This son was the staff of the poor widow's age ; and therefore when God had thus in a way of singular mercy, maintained and continued their lives together, that he should take away the life of the one, and, with it, the comfort of the life of the other, was a gloomy and bitter providence ; and we find, as it greatly distressed the poor woman, so it deeply affected the good prophet ; and God gave back the lad to his mother, as the answer of his prayer. And though, in both these cases, light soon arose out

of darkness; yet how many of the faithful and dear servants of God, have been exercised with dark providences of this kind, which to them have been never cleared up in this world: for even those things, which they have received as great blessings at the hands of divine mercy, and, as they have been ready to hope, in answer to many prayers, have proved, either short-lived comforts, or bitter crosses? Some of the children of God have only enjoyed those endearing relations, whom they have sought by many prayers, till their affections have been strongly engaged to them, and their expectations perhaps too much raised from them; and then, to the wounding of their hearts, the attracting objects of their delight have been suddenly laid in the solitary grave. No sooner have they embraced those uncertain comforts, but the powerful hand of death has plucked them out of their bosoms, and locked them up in the prison of the grave. How many may you meet with, who, with floods of tears, will tell you, that as soon as they, and their dear relatives were affectionately united, and their souls knit together, cruel death broke the bonds, and cut the cords, and for ever dissolved the desirable union, between them and the objects of their delight? Thus, when God hath, in peculiar mercy, bestowed desirable

able relative blessings on his precious servants, that he should so quickly remove them, notwithstanding all their prayers and tears, will, I doubt not, by those that have been, or are in such a manner exercised, be reckoned among the dark and obscure foot-steps of him, who hath *his way in the sea, and his path in the great waters*^t. And, by these, and such like dispensations, we may learn,

(1.) *That all outward comforts, are uncertain even to those that have a new covenant right to all good things; yea, who have an everlasting interest in the love and favour of that God, who is the fountain of all mercy, and the giver of all good.*

OUR gracious God has engaged to continue his fatherly love to his saints, to afford them his constant protection, and special presence, and to vouchsafe them such a measure of outward mercies too, as may be most conducive to his glory, and their real welfare: but, as to the continuance of the enjoyment of their riches, honours, friends, relations, health, strength, or any other of the outward comforts they at present possess, no assurance, in an ordinary way, can be obtained; for uncertainty is written in the forehead of all sublunary enjoyments: nor doth the heavenly charter

absolutely secure the continuance of any of these things to the heirs of promise ; and how suddenly they have been removed from the most eminent saints, the holy scriptures, and our daily observation of the conduct of divine providence, will abundantly inform us.

(2.) *W*e learn, that the all-wise governor of the world often deprives his own people of their most pleasant outward comforts, and endearing relations, when he is not displeased with them, nor provoked, by any particular transgression of theirs, so to do.

To correct for sin, is not always the design of God, in afflicting his saints : nor have we the least intimation that the pious women above mentioned did, by any peculiar miscarriage, offend the Lord, and cause him to remove their children out of their bosoms, and, for a time, place them among the dead. Indeed it is very common for those that fear the Lord above many, to conclude, under such dispensations, that God is now reckoning with them for their sins ; as we find one of those godly matrons did : “ *Art thou come unto me,*” says she to the prophet, “ *to call my sin to remembrance,*” “ *and to slay my son* ? ” To be in an especial manner searching and trying our ways, at such seasons, is certainly a very safe and com-

commendable practice; and whatever sublunar delights God is pleased to take away from us, or what bitter sorrows soever he brings upon us, we must all acknowledge, that he punishes us less than our iniquities deserve. But yet under the smartest strokes of his sovereign hand, we may not always conclude he is *visiting our transgressions with the rod, and our iniquities with stripes*^w. Was ever man more surprisingly and entirely stript than *Job*? he had not only many, but even all his outward comforts removed at once; yea, and besides this, every part of his body is smitten with a loathsome disease; his friends suspect his integrity, and prove miserable comforters to him; and, which is worst of all, God hides his face from him: and yet, notwithstanding this, the Lord, the searcher of all hearts, testifies for *Job*, that he had not been guilty of any particular sin, which had occasioned this dreadful complication of unparallelled calamities, “*thou movedst me against him*” says the Lord to Satan, “*to destroy him with-out cause*,” i. e. though there was good cause for *Job*’s affliction, yet there was no such cause as Satan accused him of; nor had he been guilty of any particular transgression, for which God thus delivered him into the hands of the great adversary.

(3.) *Hence*

^w *Psal. lxxxix. 32.* ^x *Job ii. 3,*

(3.) *Hence we may learn, that it is our duty and interest to check and guard our affections, that they may not intemperately cleave to any thing here.*

FOR as the more our hearts are set on these dying comforts, the greater is our danger of losing of them ; so the more bitter certainly will be our grief at parting with them. We often procure, and increase our own sorrows, by over-loving our outward enjoyments. The deep wounds we receive by our sharpest afflictions, are frequently owing to the strength of our unmortified passions. Sometimes, perhaps, we can scarcely bear to think that our endearing relatives must die ; and how then shall we bear to see them dead ? They who habitually view their wives and children, and other relations and outward blessings, in the light which christianity recommends ; and *are even, as the apostle says, as though they had no* such enjoyments ; these, I say, are the persons who will, if the wise God see meet to take them away, *weep as though they wept not*^y. Therefore, that we may not offend God on the one hand, and *pierce ourselves through with many sorrows*, on the other, let us carefully keep at a due distance from, and daily die to all dying enjoyments, expecting they may shortly be removed from us,

us, or at least, that we must quickly remove from them.

THIRDLY, *the holy and wise providence of God is surely very dark and mysterious, in that he has not only sharply rebuked good men; but put a period to their lives, for ignorantly sinning against him; when, at the same time, they who have sinned wilfully, and knowingly, have gone unpunished.*

WE read, *1 Kings xiii.* of a prophet that came out of *Judah* by the word of the *Lord*, i. e. pursuant to the command of God, and, *he cried against the idolatrous altar at Bethel, in the word of the Lord*, i. e. in the word or message he had received from the *Lord*; and this he did in the very face of the wicked king, who had erected this altar: for *Jeroboam stood by the altar, to burn incense*². Yea, so eminent was this man's piety, that he readily and successfully prayed for *Jeroboam*, who had stretched forth his hand, in great wrath, to lay hold on him³: and such was his holy care to please God, that we find neither the craving demands of nature (for it is probable he might want food and rest) nor the promised rewards of the king, do in the least incline him to disobey *the word of the Lord*: but, on the contrary, with a noble resolution, he declares, that if

² *vers. 1.* ³ *vers. 4, 6.*

if *Jeroboam* would give him half his house, he would not go in with him, nor eat bread, nor drink water, in that place ; and that, for this reason, because he was so charged by the word of the Lord, whose commands he so carefully regards, and exactly obeys, that he will not go back by the way which he came^b. This good man ran well, had he but held out to the end of his journey. But, after his singular faithfulness, he sadly breaks his commendable resolutions : he that could, and did, with contempt and disdain, reject all the invitations and offers of a wicked prince, is easily seduced by the lying tongue of an old prophet ; who, by a premeditated falsehood, delivered in the name of the Lord, brings the man of God ignorantly out of God's way, to eat bread, and drink water, at his house^c. But how melancholy was the consequence, both to the deluder, and him that was deluded ? they both found sorrow tread on the heels of sin ; for as the one was a perfidious and cruel host, so the other was but an uncomfortable and dying guest. The former had not the opportunity of gratifying his curiosity with the good prophet's discoveries of future events, (which it is probable he aimed at) but was forced to deliver the threatening prediction, that proved himself a liar, and to re-
prove

^b vers. 8, 9.

^c vers. 18, 19.

prove the deceived prophet for his too easy credulity, and great disobedience; and also to let him know, that such would be the correcting hand of God upon him, that though he should shortly come to his grave, yet never *to the sepulchre of his fathers*^d. And quickly did the good prophet find, that he, who, but a little before, told him a wilful lie, *in the name of the Lord*, did now, against his will, speak the true and terrible *word of the Lord* to him; for no sooner does he depart from the unhappy house, to which he should not have come; but he is in the way met and slain by a lion, and is, at last, laid in the old prophet's grave, whose sin was the leading and sad occasion of his untimely death^e. He that was not to enter into any house in *Betbel*, takes up his dwelling there till the day of the resurrection: he offended God in resting and refreshing his body in the place of idolatrous worship, and one of their sepulchres becomes his long home. All this while we read of no dreadful rebukes of providence attending the old prophet; though he was, not only a partaker of this good man's sin, but the great occasion of it; and one who, though he prophesied in the name of the Lord, and seemed to respect the servants of God; yet we have just ground

to

to fear, was himself but an ungodly man: for, *first*, he had removed from *Samaria* to *Bethel*^f, where was the seat and centre of abominable idolatries, which we have not the least ground, that I know of, to suppose he did, with a design to attempt a reformation, or with a resolution to bear a faithful testimony against the false and idolatrous worship that prevailed there, and, at which, some think, his sons were present, when the man of God came to *cry against the altar*: and it is very doubtful whether he himself did not fall in with the sins of the times, or, however, *hold the truth in unrighteousness*. And then it is evident, he told a contrived premeditated lie: and fathered it too on the God of truth, who *cannot lie*, saying *an angel spake unto him by the word of the Lord*^g. Moreover, he does all this after the man of God had told him, that the Lord had charged him not to eat bread, nor drink water, in that place: so that he could not but know, it would be a great sin in the good prophet, to comply with his motion, and that it was no less in him to desire it. Now to invent a lie, and deliver it in the name of the Lord, in order to intice a servant of God to sin against him, is not surely the spot of one of God's children. And to all this it must be added, that though he declares

^f 2 King. xxiii. 18.

^g 1 King. xiii. 18.

clares to the good prophet, what would be the consequence of his sin ; yet we do not find him under any manner of remorse, or concern, for his own. So that, upon the whole, if I may not say this was certainly an unregenerate man, yet, it is evident, that as his sin was very great, so there is just ground to fear his state was not truly good ; and yet his life is spared, and we have no intimation of any peculiar trouble that did embitter it ; but have rather reason to suppose, that he came to his grave in peace^h : while, at the same time, the sincere and holy prophet, whom he had deceived, and thereby drawn into sin, is brought to a surprising, tragical, and untimely end, for the same. Now, that *the judge of all the earth*, who cannot but *do right*, should thus sharply correct, and bitterly punish the involuntary offences of his most sincere servants ; and, at the same time, suffer those to escape (at least for a long time) the visible strokes of his displeasure, who have contracted much guilt themselves, and occasioned the sins of others, is surely another instance, wherein the ways of his righteous providence are *past finding out*. And, from hence, we should learn,

(1.) *That it is very unsafe to judge the state of men, by the circumstances under which*

provi-

^h 1 King. xiii. 31. compare with 2 King. xxiii. 18.

providence brings them in this world, for hereby, as the wise man says, *neither love nor hatred can be known*ⁱ. God never designed that the dispensations of his providence should discover to the children of men, the objects of his peculiar and paternal love. His favourites are not always, nor indeed often, distinguished with the smiles of his providence: and his written word, and not his providential conduct, characterizes and discovers his precious saints; who are better known by their carriage towards God, than by his dispensations towards them.

(2.) *We may learn, that the sins of the best men are so displeasing to a holy God, that they cannot expect to sin without impunity.* Those may indeed go unpunished, for a time, who must feel the weight of omnipotent justice, to all eternity: but God so loves the persons of his adopted, and hates their sins, that both his righteousness, and his mercy, induce him to punish them in this world for their iniquities^k, while their everlasting salvation is secure. Such is his holiness, that he will not tolerate sin in any, much less in those that are so nigh him, who belong to his family, are the favourites of his court, his children, and the objects of his love and delight^l. Nay, the Lord may, and sometimes does, mortally

ⁱ Eccles. ix. 1, 2. ^k Psalm lxxxix. 31. ^l Amos iii. 2. Heb. xii. 6.

mortally wound his dear children with his correcting rod ; and though they die under the hand of his righteous and holy discipline, his wisdom is not to be impeached, nor his love or faithfulness to be doubted. We see an eminent instance of this, in the prophet, whose case we have just now considered. And *Moses*, you know, was commanded to go up to mount *Nebo*, and to die there, and *be gathered to his people*, as *Aaron* his brother died in mount *Hor* ; and the reason given for both these dispensations is, *because they transgressed against the Lord among the children of Israel, at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin* ; and *because they sanctified not the Lord in the midst of the children of Israel*^m. Thus we see the righteous are corrected in life, and sometimes at death too ; while the ungodly spend their days in tranquility, and often have, at last, a peaceable and an easy exit, and *there are no bands in their death*ⁿ. But, notwithstanding all this, there is no hope of their escaping the righteous judgment of God : ~~they are but like sheep~~
~~reserved for the slaughter, whose throats~~
~~must be cut, and they hewed to pieces,~~
~~when they are taken out of their fat pasture.~~ So poor sinners are liberally fed with the bounty of heaven, and merrily drink of the

G pleasant

^m Deut. xxxii. 49, 50, 51.

^a Psal. lxxiii. 4.

pleasant streams of divine mercy, till, on a sudden, they are plunged into, and for ever overwhelmed, with the unmixed wrath and vengeance of God. Therefore, *though sentence against an evil work be not speedily executed, yet let not the hearts of the sons of men be fully set in them to do evil*^o: for as judgment begins at God's house, dreadful will be the sinner's doom at last. But,

FOURTHLY, *Another part of the conduct of divine providence, which I cannot but account dark and mysterious, is, that God should sometimes, not only for a time, refuse to give success to, but, in appearance, frown upon his people, when their cause has been just; and when they have been engaged against unrighteous persons, and that, out of a godly zeal, to punish the vilest practices; nay, and even when they have asked counsel of the Lord, and have obtained his approbation of their proceedings.*

The *Benjamites* refused to deliver up to justice those wretched miscreants, who had been guilty of worse than beastly wickedness towards the *Levite's* concubine; whereupon all the other tribes resolved they would reclaim, if possible, this stubborn people, and shew their just indignation against that horrid wickedness that had been perpetrated among them; and the insolent and inflexible behaviour of the *Benjamites* rendering

rendering gentle methods ineffectual, and their brethren being obliged to fight against them with the sword, they enquire of the Lord, who should be first in the enterprize; and he tells them *Judah*^p. Now, though their cause was certainly good, and their general aim seems to be right, *viz.* to *put away evil from Israel*^q; and though they also discovered a laudable regard to divine direction, as to the manner of their procedure; and the children of *Benjamin*, on the other hand, had been very wicked, and added greatly to their wickedness, by attempting to screen the most monstrous offenders from justice; yet the latter is, at first, flushed with a victory, and of the former, no less than twenty-two thousand persons are slain^r: whereupon we find the tribes of *Israel* humble themselves before the Lord, and earnestly enquire whether they should again go up to battle, against their brother *Benjamin*, or not; and they receive an express command, to go up against them; and yet, even then, does *Bejamin* *destroy down to the ground, of the children of Israel, eighteen thousand men that drew the sword*^t. Now, for persons, whose cause was just and good, and who had, in their progress, with ardent and repeated requests, sought direction,

G 2

from

^p Judg. xx. 18.
^r ver. 25.

^q ver. 13.

^t ver. 21.

from that God who hears prayer, to fly and fall once and again before their enemies (who seem to have restrained prayer, and, in a great measure, to have cast off the fear of the Lord) as this doubtless was by them, so I think it justly may by us, be accounted a very dark and distressing providence. Hence then we should learn,

(1.) *THAT to judge of the undertaking by the effect, is a very unsafe rule.*

THE holy God may, for a time, seem to frown on a righteous cause, and the things he approves of do not always prosper as soon as they are prosecuted ; and though God cannot but abhor wicked practices ; yet sometimes, in the course of his providence, he has seemed to *shine on wicked men's counsels*^t. When *Dionyfius* had robbed the temple, the story faith, that, at his return by sea, he had a fair gale, and pleasant weather, to waft him home with the spoils, which made him say to those that were with him, “ see how the “ *heavens smile upon us, &c.*” So, on the other hand, many instances may be given, wherein the wise and good God has, for a time, denied success to those undertakings with which he has been well pleased. The *Jews* who engaged in building the *temple*, in the days of *Cyrus*, were in the way of their duty ; and yet the Lord suffered their enemies

enemies to weaken their hands, and frustrate their work till the reign of *Darius* ^u.

(2.) *We learn, that we are not only to take heed, that the business in which we engage, be according to the good and acceptable will of God; but also it should be our concern to obtain frames suitable to the nature of our work.*

OH with what pangs of grief should *Israel* have gone out to battle against *Benjamin* their brother, not being enraged against their persons, though bitterly afflicted for their sins; desirous to reform them from their abominable wickedness, but very unwilling to cause them to fall by the edge of the sword! They should be greatly in love with the souls of others, and afflicted for their sins, who would aright correct them for their faults. Now *Israel*, at the first, seem to have wanted more affecting apprehensions of the tragical nature of the work they undertook, and a greater concern for the real good of the people, whom they had a sufficient warrant to punish.

(3.) *Let us learn, before we undertake to correct the faults of others, carefully and impartially to inspect our own ways; and, first of all, to reform whatsoever is amiss in or among ourselves; for surely there were,*

G 3

at

Ezra iv. 3, &c.

at this day, even with the people of *Israel*,
grievous sins against the Lord.

THE foregoing chapter informs us, not only of the idolatry of *Micah* and his family; but gives us sad instances of the prevalence thereof in the tribe of *Dan*. *Micah* had an house of Gods, and he seems to have valued his Gods above all his house; his mother makes him images, and he makes one of his sons a priest to them, which were no Gods, till he obtains a degenerate wandering *Levite*, with whom he expected a blessing, but by whom no good came; for the tribe of *Dan* first seek direction from the idolatrous priest, and then carry away priest and gods together. Now these things connived or winked at in *Israel*, must needs displease the Lord; and therefore they should have put away evil from among themselves, before they had attempted to punish it in *Benjamin*; they should have washed their own hands in innocency, before they had drawn their swords against their brethren; otherwise, the words afterwards spoken to their successors by the prophet *Zechariah*, might have been seasonable for them: *Thus saith God, why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the Lord, he bath also forsaken you.* 2 Chron. xxiv. 20. Again,

(4.) LET

(4.) *LET this instance teach us, when we are in the way of our duty, patiently to wait upon, and entirely to submit to God, as to the success of our undertakings.*

WE must by no means desist from a good work, because God does not immediately make us prosperous therein: nor may we rashly conclude, that because the Lord has seemed to *bide himself* from us, at one time, he will refuse to appear in our favour, at another. Our God certainly times all his mercies according to his own infinitely-wise counsel, and it becomes the works of his hands to wait patiently for him, without limiting of him, or prescribing to him how, or when, he shall work. *God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts.* It is common for men, when they are ready to think they cannot miss of success and prosperity in their undertakings, even then to meet with the greatest disappointments, and fall into the most dismal distresses. And, on the other hand, when in the bitterness of their souls, through the power of their unbelief, they are ready to cry out, *there is no hope,* then, even *in the mount of straits, does the Lord appear,* and shine on their paths with the rays of his mercy, and make their ways prosperous by the stretched out arm of his power. As here, you see, when his providence towards his

people *Israel* had once and again appeared with a very frowning aspect ; yet, after all, he evidently espouses their righteous cause, and makes them victorious over the stubborn *Benjamites*. In a good way and work, let us, therefore, wait patiently for the Lord, and yet look for him, who, for a season, for wise ends, *hideth himself from the house of Jacob*. Very dark and discouraging providences do frequently precede the most bright and smiling dispensations. His almighty hand, that commands and conducts the winds and waves, seemed, at first, to oppose the seasonable attempts of our great deliverer king *William*, until his courage and faith were properly tried ; and then his way was made prosperous, and he became our common saviour. But again,

(5.) *THE divine conduct is to us very dark and unsearchable ; in that, when the Lord seems to have much good work to do in a nation or place, and proper instruments, in our apprehensions, appear, and engage in it, and that with good success ; that those very persons should sometimes be so hastily removed, and thereby the work of God obstructed, and that for many years together.*

IN the dawning of the glorious day of the reformation, when, after innumerable nights, yea, many ages of thick and gloomy darkness, the sun of righteousness darted his

his bright and glorious rays on our native land, the Lord raised up the early pious, and eminently religious king *Edward VI.* to engage in that excellent work ; a prince whom the great *Cardanus* calls *a miracle of nature*, and in whose praise the best historians think they cannot say enough ; who, of all our *English* monarchs, is most fitly compared to that celebrated reformer *Josiah* ; for he began to reign at nine years of age, as the other did at eight, and engaged in the work of reformation much sooner than *Josiah* did : he had a very high esteem for the holy scriptures, according to which this great work was to be squared, and which had been, by the enemies and murderers of souls, long concealed from our forefathers : therefore, when at the time of his coronation, the swords were delivered to him, as king of *England*, *France*, and *Ireland*, having received them, he said, “ *there is yet another sword to be delivered to me* ;” at which the lords wondering, “ *I mean*,” said he, “ *the sacred Bible, which is the sword of the spirit, and without which we are nothing, neither can we do any thing.*” And as he prized the word of the Lord himself, so he soon restored it to his people ; and, that they might all have opportunity to peruse the inspired writings, he ordered a large Bible in

in *English*, with the paraphrase of *Erasmus* on the gospels, to be set up in every church, in which, at all times, those that could, might go and read, and they that could not read, might go and hear. He abolished the six popish articles, for the denying of which, many excellent men suffered most cruel martyrdom in his father's days, and would not by any means be prevailed with, ever to restore them. They were these: (1.) That after speaking the words of consecration by the priest, the bread and wine in the sacrament are transubstantiated into the very body and blood of Christ, as he was conceived and crucified, and into no other substance. (2.) That the communion in both kinds is not necessary. (3.) That priests may not marry. (4.) That vows of *chastity*, I suppose they mean *celibacy*, or single life, ought to be observed by the law of God. (5.) That private masses be continued. And, (6.) That auricular confession was necessary, and to be retained in the church. Moreover, for the better instruction of the people, this good prince restored those ministers who in the former reign were banished, or forced to leave their native land, for truth's sake; and dumb prelates and priests were compelled to give place to those, who, by painful preaching, would labour to instruct the people in christian

stian knowledge. Divers persons, distinguished for their great piety, judgment, and learning, were sent for, out of foreign parts, to carry on this good work of reformation, such as *Peter Martyr*, *Martin Bucer*, *Paulus Fagius*, &c. men whose works still *praise them in the gates*: yea, such was the holy zeal that warmed, and even flamed in the royal breast of this good king; that when the *Devonshire* rebels petitioned to have the above mentioned six popish articles, with other tenets and superstitious practices of that church restored, he assured them, “*that as it was the cause of God, he had taken upon him thoroughly to maintain, so he would never move a hair’s breadth, nor give place to any creature living.*” And when it was requested, by *Charles*, emperor of *Germany*, that his sister, the lady *Mary*, afterwards our bloody queen, might have the liberty of mass in her own house; the lords of the council having consulted the matter, and resolving to pursue the rules of policy, sent *Cranmer*, archbishop of *Canterbury*, and *Ridley*, bishop of *London*, to his majesty, to persuade him to comply with this matter. But when the king had heard what they had to say, he answered them so gravely, and argumentatively, out of the scriptures, as, faith the historian, obliged them to give place to his replications,

and

and grant the same to be true : after which, they argued with him like statesmen, more than divines, suggesting what danger the denying thereof might bring to his majesty, as a breach of amity with the emperor, &c. The pious king desiring them to be satisfied, said, “ *he would spend his life, and all that he had, rather than agree to, and grant that which he certainly knew to be against the truth.*” But, they still continuing to urge him, at length he burst out into tears, desiring them still to be content, which caused the bishops themselves to weep also, to see his zeal and constancy. And the archbishop afterwards told Mr. Cheke, the king’s school-master, “ *that he might rejoice all his days, that he had such a scholar ; for, faith he, he has more divinity in his little finger, than all we have in all our bodies.*” Thus the king maintained his integrity, and the lady *Mary*’s mass was at that time prevented¹ ; and, when she came to the throne, the two reverend prelates, who pleaded in her behalf, were rewarded with the crown of martyrdom. Much more might be said of the eminent piety and uncommon abilities of this young prince, and his laudable zeal for propagating the gospel, and carrying on the work of reformation, which, as a learned modern observes, “ *now went on in earnest, and would, at*

¹ See Fox’s Martyrol. p. 1179.

" at that time, in all probability, have been
 " carried to a pitch, that it is not to this
 " day arrived at, had it pleased God to have
 " favoured that prince with a longer life "?

Certainly then we must conclude, that the early and hasty removal of such a powerful vigorous instrument for the carrying on the work of God, was to this land, and the people of God here, a very dark and gloomy dispensation.

MANY inferior magistrates also, from whom the publick have received great advantages, and had a prospect of greater, have, at a time, when, in our apprehensions, their lives might have been most eminently serviceable to the interest of religion, and the good of mankind, been surprisingly placed among the dead ; their *breath has gone forth, and they have returned to the earth*, and then their good purposes, and our raised expectations, *have perished* together. And not only has it been thus among the nations ; but such like providences have frequently attended the Sion of our God, the several churches of his son Christ Jesus. The wise and absolute sovereign has often called away from particular societies, or taken home to himself, the most eminently useful persons among them ; such, by whom his own interest has been
 princip-

principally supported and encouraged, and this frequently too, in the midst of their usefulness ; by whose departure his people have been reduced to very great straits, and have too often fell under visible and dismal declensions. Have we not many times seen the labourers in the Lord's harvest, who were well furnished for his service, and placed, by his wise providence, where they had an encouraging prospect of doing much for God, and the souls of men, suddenly discharged from all their work, and, in the prime of their days, called home to rest ; while those who hoped to have been long blessed with the benefit of their labours, have, with showers of tears, attended them to their graves ? And have we not also, in such places, often seen a stop put to the visible progress of religion, even for many years ? Yea such sad and lamentable dissensions and divisions have often prevailed among the professors thereof, on such occasions, that *the shepherd being smitten, the sheep have been scattered* ; and such a dark night has overtaken them, that, as their stars have been obscured in the gloomy shades of death, so their *candlesticks* have been also *removed out of their places*, and they have no longer held forth the light of the word to a dark world.

I HAVE

I HAVE sometimes thought it was a very dark and sorrowful providence to the church at *Ephesus*, that such a minister as *Paul* should take his final farewell of them, at a time when they so much desired his presence, and did so much need his assistance. *He had been with them in all seasons, served the Lord among them with all humility of mind, and kept back nothing that was profitable, but taught them publickly, and from house to house^x, and, for the space of three years, he ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears^y.* Now surely such a minister as *Paul*, was, at this time, greatly wanted at *Ephesus*; for grievous wolves were shortly to enter in among them, not sparing the flock: yea, from their own selves were men about to arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them^z. Peculiarly needful then was his assistance, who was so well able, by sound doctrine, to silence and convince gainsayers, and by whose indefatigable care and diligence, those ravening wolves might have been prevented from preying on the precious sheep of Christ. No doubt but his sage instructions and apostolick admonitions would, with a divine blessing, have reclaimed, and brought to a gospel temper those men of perverse minds, and his ravishing discourses of the glory

^x Acts xx. 20. ^y ver. 31. ^z ver. 29, 30.

glory of Christ, and the greatness of his love, would certainly have been an excellent means to have maintained those lively affections towards God, and that warm zeal for his ways, which, after the departure of this good and great man, did sadly decay. It is also evident that their affections were mightily engaged to him, and it was impossible it should be otherwise; neither is it to be doubted, but they earnestly desired his abode with them; for, at his departure, *they all wept sore, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more*^a. Now, I say, that a person so well qualified for the church's service, should depart from the flock of Christ at *Ephesus*, to return no more, at a time when his assistance was so much wanting, and so much desired, must surely be to them a very dark and distressing providence: and yet we have often observed such occurrences, in which the divine conduct has seemed more strange and mysterious; for it is evident there were some left to feed, take care of, and watch over this church, to whom the apostle, before his departure, gave a very awful and affecting charge: but from how many places have we seen useful and desirable ministers removed by death, their pulpits left empty, and

and their desolate congregations ready to cry out, in the bitterness of their souls, that they *have spread forth their hands, and there has been none to comfort them!*^b Yea, and their enemies, when they have heard of their trouble, have *been glad, because the Lord had done it*^c : while they have often condoled their own sad circumstances, in the mournful words of the church, *is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by, behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me, in the day of his fierce anger!*^d Now, for God to remove the useful and and eminent instruments of his glory, either magistrates, ministers, or private christians, at a time when they seem to have greatest opportunities of being serviceable to his interest, and thereby deeply afflict, their souls, who are tenderly concerned for the honour of his name ; and, at the same time, suffer such to take occasion of rejoicing and triumphing, who hate religion, and the promoters and professors thereof, is surely a convincing instance of the mysterious, and incomprehensible nature of his holy providence, *whose ways are past finding out.*

BUT it is time now, that I should en-
H deavour

^b Lam. i. 17. ^c vers. 21. ^d Lam. i. 12.

deavour to improve this point, by offering some inferences from it. And,

(1.) FROM hence we may learn, *to lay hold on all opportunities, to do the utmost good we can ourselves, and get all the good we can by others.*

IT is sinful, and dangerous, to please ourselves with future purposes, and thereby neglect present duties. Many persons, as likely to live as ourselves, and, to all appearance, more capable of service to God and men in their day, have been, in a surprising manner, overtaken by *the night, in which no man can work.* It is therefore the highest wisdom, as well as our incumbent duty, to observe and improve our seasons for doing good, while it is in the power of our hands to do it. There is not an opportunity we have of this kind, but may, for any thing we know, be the last we shall have for ever. We may indeed justly wonder that we are spared hitherto, and can, by no means, depend on a long series of future seasons, to prosecute that work, we are now so prone to neglect; for we see that the best of men have often purposed to do that good, which they have never lived to accomplish; their *days being past, their purposes have been broken off, even the thoughts of their hearts.*

THESE

• Job xvii. 13.

THESE considerations should likewise excite us to improve the piety, abilities, and labours of other men. Consider how glad would some of us now be, to hear the favourable discourses, and receive the wise and pious counsels and instructions, of many of those eminent ministers, and other christians, the advantages of which we did not improve, as we ought to have done, while we enjoyed them, and whose lips are now closed by the cold hand of death. We are ready to think, in our sad and solitary hours, that had we been apprized how soon our worthy friends would have been removed, we would have attended on their instructions, with more care and frequency; would have asked them many more weighty qustions, and would surely have endeavoured to get more solid profit, by their conversation, and ministry. There is an honest, and honourable way of getting much by the best men, and, by such gain, we shall profit them, as well as ourselves. " The expence of one minute's " breath in season, may, if God concur with " it, be to you the ground of breathing " forth prarie to God to all eternity^f." Seeing the most able, and active instruments by whom God does good in the world, may suddenly, and will shortly, be removed out of it, let us strive to make the best im-

provement of them, which is the most likely way to enjoy them long, or to be the better capacitated to live without them!

(2.) *IT may teach us to pray earnestly, and often, for those excellent persons, whose assistance we and others so much need, and who, if spared, may, by their useful lives, be great blessings in their generation.*

WHEN we see men eminently qualified for God's service, and zealously and chearfully engaged therein, we should esteem them very bigly for their works sake, and desire of our God, with submission, that he would spare them, for his own name's sake. The Lord may, and it is very likely often does, prolong the lives of some of his servants, in answer to the prayers of others. That aged and very excellent servant of the Lord, Dr. *J. Mather*, speaking of the continuance of his own life, " *I must acknowledge, says he, that the prayers of the Lord's people, in that dear flock to which I am related, and of many others, have been the means of lengthening my days, for so long a time^a.*" *Melanchton* ascribes his recovery from a dangerous sickness to the prevalency of *Luther's* prayer, and says, " *if Luther had not come to him, he had died^b.*" By
praying

^a Pref. to his medit. on the heavenly world. p. 5.

^b Clark's examp. p. 534.

praying for the life of one man, we may be great blessings to the souls of many, and give them endless occasions for the offering up the highest praise to God.

(3.) *LET it teach us, carefully to avoid trusting too much unto, or leaning to hard upon, the best of men.*

EVERY man's breath is but in his nostrils, and no man can continue his own being, much less make others blessed. Nothing is more common, than for the most promising human supports utterly to fail poor mortals; irresistible death has often, in the most surprising manner, reared his trophies in the pompous palaces of the greatest and the best princes; and his powerful hand has suddenly silenced the most charming ambassadors of the gospel of peace. The hasty strokes of this universal conqueror, have often removed our most useful friends into the silent grave, and, in a few moments, rendered our most endearing relatives, utterly incapable of being any further serviceable to us. The God of our mercies has no where promised to continue any of our external enjoyments, though he has graciously engaged, not only to be our God; but that his presence shall be ever with us, and he *will never leave us, nor forsake us*: let us therefore depend on *him*, and not on *them*.

(4.) *LET it also teach us, to have a care we do not draw rash, and desperate conclusions, under such dispensations.*

FOR we may see we are not the only persons, amongst the godly, whom the Lord has brought under such trying circumstances. The supreme and absolute sovereign has removed from other places and societies, as eminent instruments of his glory, and his church's good, as any we can be mourning for: and it is our interest and duty, patiently to submit to him, who has a perfect right to do all his pleasure; and who has governed the world, in infinite wisdom, ever since he first brought it out of nothing. It will not therefore become us, under dark providences of this kind, to conclude that the interest of religion, in one place or another, must expire, or give up the ghost. Can that ship sink, whose pilot he is, who *made the seas, and upholds the dry land?* There is no doubt, but the unchangeable God of truth will be faithful to his promises, and always manifest a tender regard to his afflicted *Sion:* therefore, in dark and gloomy days, let all, whose hearts tremble for the ark, learn, with the prophet, to *wait upon the Lord, who hideth himself from the house of Jacob, and to look for him*¹.

SIXTHLY,

¹ *Isai. viii. 17.*

SIXTHLY, Another instance, in which the judgments of God appear to be a great deep, is this; that when men of eminent piety have, with religious views, engaged in the most necessary work, and, by diligent and painful labour, have brought the same even to its designed perfection; all their endeavours should, by one frowning dismal providence, be blasted, and rendered ineffectual, and utterly useless.

THE more capable and active any man is in doing good, the more he is like that God, who is the author of all good; and of all the good we can do, that is most excellent, which has the most direct tendency to exalt and display the glory of God, and does most extensively contribute to further the real welfare, and immortal blessedness of men: and the more excellent and useful the work is, the more ground we have to expect success and prosperity, in the prosecution of it. Now the most excellent means, that ever this lower world was blessed with, to manifest the surpassing glory of God, and secure the eternal interest of men, are the holy scriptures: but that these sacred and sublime oracles may be thus beneficial to any nation or people, it is absolutely necessary that they have them in a language they understand, which is a blessing our ancestors were, in a great measure, if

not entirely, deprived of, for many hundred years together. Mr. *Wickliff* was the first, I can meet with, who, after this nation had been, for six hundred years, or thereabouts, deprived of the scriptures, did undertake to translate them into our language. He lived in the reign of *Richard II*, died in the year 1384, and all his books were sentenced to the flames, by the council of *Constance*, in 1414: and so the inhabitants of the land of our nativity, who understood not the learned languages, were kept, in a great measure, strangers to the inspired writings, till it pleased God to raise up the renowned Mr. *Tindal*, a valiant champion for the truth, who, when a person (called a learned divine) blasphemously told him, it were better to be without God's law, than the pope's, Mr. *Tindal*, like a true christian hero, replied, "that he defied the pope, and all his laws; and that, if God spared his life, ere many years, he would cause a boy that drove the plough, to know more of the scriptures, than he did." To effect this noble and glorious design, Mr. *Tindal*, in the year 1527, translated the new testament, and began the old, compleated the five books of *Moses*, and prefaced useful pious prologues to each book: this he did, while an exile in *Germany*. But now behold the unsearchable depths of divine providence! this good man

man sailing to *Hamburgb*, with design to print his necessary and useful labours there, suffered shipwreck on the coast of *Holland*, and lost all his books, writings, and copies^k. Surely the papists (who were so ready to find fault with this faithful servant of Christ, that if in any of his writings an [j] wanted but a tittle, they reckoned it for an heresy^l) would not now neglect to improve this dreadful providence against the truth; nor omit to pass their severest censures on him, who had gone through so much labour and travel to propagate it. It cannot be thought they would spare to say, that though he escaped their hands on the shore, divine vengeance met him on the seas; or that the waves had commission from God to war against, and destroy his heretical works. Now, to have the fruit of so much pains, in such a necessary and religious undertaking, by the occurrence of such a sad calamity, rendered utterly useless, to the great grief of good men, and the joy and triumph of those who were enemies to all that is good, may surely be accounted a very dark, and amazing providence of God; but, as *Job* observes, *many such things are with him*^m. Mr. *Tindal* is not the only man, whose faith and patience the wise God has thus tried, and exercised: the

^k *Fox.* p. 983.

^l *ibid.*

^m *Job xxiii. 14.*

the best of men, in the prosecution of the best work, have often met with strange crosses, and unthought-of disappointments, and those, even while the holy providence of the righteous God, *has seemed to shine upon the counsels of the wicked*ⁿ; i. e. such things have occurred in the course of his wise conduct, as have *answered their desires*, and by which, they have *furthered their wicked devices*^o. These things then, give us occasion to infer,

(1.) *THAT it is very unsafe to judge men's works, to be good or bad, by the frowns or smiles of providence, that seem to attend them therein.*

WHAT God requires and approves of, is better learnt by the holy scriptures, than by the successes or disappointments of providence. It is possible men may think God prospers, and furthers them in those ways, in which they may hereafter find they did not please, but provoke him: for prosperous providences have often attended men, while they have been perpetrating those evils, for which they will certainly be condemned hereafter. The Lord made the king of *Affyria* successful, and used him as *the rod of his anger against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of his wrath, with a charge, to take the spoil, and the*

the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets^p. Now, this haughty and unjust man does all this wickedly ; but yet the righteous hand of divine providence made his work prosperous, to correct and humble a professing people ; *and after he has performed his whole work upon mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, he punishes the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks^q.* And also, on the other hand, God, in the course of his providence, may seem to frown upon, and even oppose his own servants, in those religious undertakings which are well-pleasing to him, and which, he will, in the other world, reward with *an eternal weight of glory.* But,

(2.) *LET what has been observed, teach us to persevere in well doing, though dark and sorrowful providences meet us, while we are most sincerely pursuing what is our incumbent duty ; knowing that these things fall out, and are wisely ordered, for the trial of our faith and patience.*

HEREBY our wise God, and tender father, makes the glory of his grace to shine with the more radiant lustre, in the souls of his servants, to the praise of his name. We must patiently continue in the way of our duty, though the Lord see meet to with-

^p Isai. x. 5. 6. ^q vers. 12.

with-hold the smiles of his providence. Mr. *Tindal's* sad disappointment did not cause him to lay aside the excellent work, in which he was engaged: for at *Hamburgh*, with the assistance of Mr. *Coverdale*, he soon translated the five books of *Moses*; and, I think, before his martyrdom, the whole bible, though it was not printed till after his death. And so faithful was he therein, that, in a letter to Mr. *Frith*, he thus appeals to the searcher of all hearts;

" I call God, says he, to record, against the day we shall all appear before our Lord Jesus Christ, to give a reckoning of our doings, that I never altered one syllable of God's word against my conscience; nor would this day, if all that is in the earth, whether pleasure, honour, or riches, might be given me." Thus, under all discouragements, we must steadily cleave to our duty, and entirely submit to our sovereign Lord, as to the event and issue of all our endeavours; being willing to be any thing, or nothing, so that we may abundantly glorify and honour him, who we know is *all in all*. And then,

(3.) *LET us be cautious how we discover much confidence of the success of a good undertaking.*

FOR the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: and

and he has many ways to use his servants to his glory ; and often, to that end, brings them under such providences, as *they looked not for*. If the work we undertake and pursue be good, and our hearts therein are right in his sight, who searcheth them, we may be sure of gracious assistance, kind acceptance, and an eternal reward, from free grace, at last. But we cannot, ordinarily, be assured that our God will so far prosper us, in any particular undertaking, that neither Satan, wicked men, nor any croſs providence ſhall baffle, or frustrate us therein. That we ſhould make it the principal buſineſs of our lives to do good, is moſt evident, from the law of nature, and the light of scripture ; but when, wherein, or how far, we ſhall ſucceed, ordinarily, the event only muſt determine. But again,

SEVENTHLY, Another instance of the great mystery of providence is, *that when those, whose prayers God has promised to bear, have in a ſpecial, and ſolemn manner, been ſeeking of him, and earnestly beggiſg direction and ſucceſſ from him, as to particular and momentous affairs, relating to themſelves, or others, that after this, providence ſhould, for a long time, in many and various instances, run counter to their prayers, and diſappoint their hopes and expeſtations ; this, I ſay, is another instance of the muſterious, and incomprehenſible*

preferable nature, of his wise dispensations, whose ways are above our ways, and too wonderful for us to find out to perfection.

NOTHING is more plain in the divine word, than the promises of the God of truth to hear, and answer the prayers of his servants, for all things they ask, agreeable to his will; which is all they want, or all that would be for their real good. Many scriptures are full to this purpose, as *Matt. vii. 7, 8. Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* So *John xiv. 13, 14. and John xv. 16. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the father in my name, he may give it you.* And *John v. 14. This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing, according to his will, he heareth us.* Nor is it to be doubted, but that those, who are truly and eminently religious, are concerned in their applications to the throne, to comport with the dispensations of providence, with which their persons and their families, the church of God, and the nation in which they dwell, are exercised; and do, there-

therefore, on extraordinary occasions, in an extraordinary manner, address their gracious God, on all these accounts: and yet how many of these have often observed, that, for a time, the Lord has seemed deaf to their cries, and the course of his holy providence has, to an eye of reason, even ran counter to their prayers? When they have desired success and prosperity in particular affairs, they have been in appearance frowned upon, and the divine hand has seemed lifted up against them therein. And thus it has many times been, as well with respect to their relative, as personal circumstances; and respecting their spiritual, as well as their temporal concerns. Have not some of the most eminent saints, by a long succession of fervent prayers, sought special grace for their unconverted relations, who have yet gone on in their sins, and grieved the hearts of their praying friends, as long as they have lived, and perhaps discredited them when dead? Now, is it not a very astonishing and tremendous depth of divine providence, that when God hears his children for their neighbours, friends, enemies, yea, for whole churches and kingdoms at once, he should seem utterly to reject their most vehement groans for the spiritual, and eternal welfare, of their own flesh and blood? Providences of this kind have often attended

ed the children of promise, with respect to their family concerns ; and when they have, by sincere and repeated prayers, sought those blessings, which, so far as they could discern, would be very conducive to the glory of God, and the spiritual and everlasting happiness of themselves, and their families ; even then, a series of such things which they looked not for, has long prevented them from the enjoyment of those desirable mercies. And thus also, when the favourites of God have, together, and apart, poured forth their souls into him, for the increase, and prosperity of his churches, yet then (as if their prayers had been cast in their faces) there has, many times, succeeded (in their apprehension at least) a visible decay of the power and practice of religion, even, among those, they have had the most peculiar regard to, in their solemn duties ; and very few, or none have been awakened to see their danger, and been brought to enquire, in good earnest, *what they must do to be saved.* In like manner, has our wise and gracious God seen meet to exercise the most excellent of the earth, when they have frequently, and solemnly sought him for national mercies. We need not go far for instances of this sort. In the latter end of the reign of queen *Anne*, many days of solemn prayer were observed, in which the

Lord

Lord was entreated, either to turn the hearts, or frustrate the designs of those, who sought to deprive us of the invaluable blessings of our holy religion, and our civil rights and liberties: and yet, for some time, the enemies of God, and our country, had a chain of uninterrupted successes, and carried every thing before them: so that we were ready to give up all for lost, e'er the Lord was pleased to interpose for our deliverance. And has not the further reformation of this kingdom been also, for many years, the subject of the prayers of thousands, of the best among us; and yet does not wickedness continue to abound in all places, and prevail among all ranks of men? But instances of this kind are innumerable; and it is probable, the reader can add many from his own observation and experience; and therefore, I need not enlarge here; but proceed to some improvement of this point. And,

(1.) *THEN, let not this cause any to say it is in vain to serve God; or that there is no profit in praying to him.* For notwithstanding these things, it is most certain, God hears, accepts, and answers the prayers of his servants. As sure as God is, so sure be *is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him*¹, in the name of Christ Jesus. *Jacob, as a prince, had power with God,*

I

and

¹ *Heb. xi. 6.*

and prevailed^t: and the God of Jacob has not said unto his seed, seek ye me in vain^u. The most gainful business, does not always bring the quickest returns: they often get most, who can stay longest. "Some prayers " (as one faith) have a longer voyage than " others; but then they come with richer " lading, at last, into the port." Christians are heavenly merchants, daily trading into the land of promise, by solemn prayer; and if they diligently pursue their business, their great gain, sooner or later, is sure, and out of hazard. There is no mercy we can want, or wish for, but some of the saints have gained by solemn prayer. Let us, therefore, be careful, that our supplications are agreeable to the will of God, revealed in the scriptures; and that, from religious principles, we offer up our requests to God, in the name of Jesus; and then we may be confident of divine acceptance, and a gracious answer, in God's time and way: for all ages have abounded with remarkable, bright, and glorious evidences of that blessed truth, that *the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers*^w.

(2.) LET it be observed, that God has often, remarkably answered those prayers of his

^t Gen. xxxii. 28. ^u Isai. xlv. 19. ^v Psalm xxxiv. 15. compared with 1 Pet. iii. 12.

his people, which, when first offered, he seemed to disregard, and which they feared he would remember no more.

A PIous praying woman of Canaan makes the most ardent addresses to the compassionate Jesus, on the behalf of her daughter, who was grievously vexed with a devil, crying out, *have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David*^x! But he, who readily relieved all other poor distressed creatures, that came to him, *answered her not a word*^y. Yea, so vehement and ardent was she in her suit, that moved the hearts of the disciples, though their Lord seemed deaf to her intreaties ; and they became her intercessors, and besought their gracious master, saying, “ *Send her away, for she crieth after us.*” It is a peculiar happiness to have an interest in their petitions, whom Jesus owns as his disciples ; and yet, though the most eminent of them may join issue with us, as to the particular mercies we ask of God, he may, for a time, seem, with a frown, to reject their requests, and ours: “ *I am not sent,*” says he, “ *but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*^z ;” q. d. “ *I am not sent as a minister, but to the Jews, only ; or it is to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that I must first execute, and discharge the office of a shepherd.*” But if

I 2

Christ

^x Matt. xv. 22.^y vers. 23.^z vers. 24.

Christ seems to repulse this poor woman, yet she reverently worships him, and still cries out, “ *Lord help me* ^a.” Notwithstanding which, our Saviour, in appearance, continues to refuse her suit, intimating, it was unreasonable: “ *It is not meet*, “ says “ *he*,” *to take the childrens bread, and to cast it to dogs* ^b.” She readily owns the truth of what was spoken, humbly applies it to herself, but still perseveres in her request, craving *some crumbs from the childrens table*; and at last, she has a gracious grant of all she could desire. “ *O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt* ^c.” If the Lord seem to frown upon us while we pray, we must not give over prayer: for, you see, for the first, second, and third times, he shewed no regard to the cries of this humble suppliant; and yet, after all, he even admires, and greatly commends her faith, and graciously grants more than she had ever asked. God’s own people may sometimes think he despises their supplications, when he is carefully filing them up in heaven, and proposes to answer them on earth, to his own glory, and their comfort.

I HAVE seen, in the library of a learned friend, a manuscript, in which is a remarkable story, concerning good Mr. *Dod*, to this effect,

^a vers. 25.

^b vers. 26.

^c vers. 27, 28.

effect, *viz.* That when he was a student in *Oxford*, designing to make the work of the ministry the business of his life, he very earnestly desired three things of God; *first*, that he might be disposed of where he might have a comfortable subsistence; *secondly*, amongst a people that might entirely love him; and, *thirdly*, where his ministry should be blest to do much good. It was not long before he was fixt, where, for a time, he was denied each of these desirable mercies; for, those of his people, that were of the greatest note, rather hated than loved him, and unjustly commenced law-suits with him, and seized all he had, to his very horse; by which they reduced him in the world so, that instead of his doing them much good, they did him much hurt. These things so affected the good man, in a melancholy walk, that, on the bare ground, and with a shower of tears, he bewailed his case before his God; but going home, it pleased God that the next Lord's day, his patron was converted by his ministry; after which, such a blessing attended his labours, as made way for his living peaceably, and prosperously among his people, greatly beloved by them, and doing much service for Christ, and their precious souls; eminently enjoying each of those three great blessings he had, in so particular a manner,

sought of the Lord by solemn prayer, at his first setting out.

NAY, not only has God answered the prayers of his servants, when they have persevered in their requests; but I am apt to think, when they, for many years, have ceased either to pray, or hope, for some particular blessings, for which they have formerly made their requests, they have, after all, had their prayers answered, and their desires granted. It can scarcely be thought, that *Zacharias* ever expected to hear any more of the requests he had made unto God, for a son; and it is probable he had many years given over seeking the Lord, as to this matter; for he was now old, and his wife well stricken in years; so that he does not readily credit the joyful tidings, when declared by the lips of an angel; and yet it is evident that *John the baptist* was given, in answer to the acceptable prayers his father, long before his birth, had made for a son⁴.

(3.) LET us learn to submit to God's time, and way, for the answer of our prayers.

Is it not reasonable, that unobliged benefactors should give, what, when, or in what way, and manner, they please? Whatever we ask, or receive of God, it is certain

⁴ Luke i. 13.

tain we deserve nothing: and if he answers our prayers, it is an act of his free and sovereign grace; for no good man can believe his prayers are worthy to be answered: and sure it does not become undeserving beggars to prescribe to the great and absolute Lord of heaven and earth, in what time, and way, he shall display his mercy towards them, and bestow his gifts upon them. To submit to the divine will, is a frame becoming every duty; and what we should labour after, under every dispensation. It is both pleasant, and gainful to resign ourselves, and our all, to the divine disposal: for, perhaps, God may sometimes cross our wills, in order to teach us to submit to his: and we all profess to believe he knows best what is good for us, and when to bestow his blessings upon us. And, therefore, as his great mercy should encourage us to address his throne; so his infinite wisdom, and absolute sovereignty, should produce in us an entire resignation to his conduct. Good men have quietly submitted unto God, under very sore afflictions; and shall not we, for the time, way, and manner, in which he shall answer our prayers? But I proceed,

EIGHTLY, *The dark and incomprehensible nature of divine providence may be observed,*

I 4

¶ Job ix. 16. ¶ Job i. 21. Psal. xl. 1.

served, in that those, who in the judgment of charity, have appeared eminently pious, have been suffered to fall into such sins, or under such sad calamities, whereby religion has been discredited, the success of the gospel hindered, and enquiring souls stumbled, and turned out of the way of life.

As it is most certain, the holy God has a jealous respect, and tender regard to his own glory; so it must be acknowledged, there is nothing more nearly affects his honour in the world, than the lives of those who make the strictest profession of his ways. The more eminently religious any man seems to be, the deeper he wounds the interest of religion, if he fail in the practical part thereof. And when those who have discovered a deep sense of the evil of sin, and professed their dependence on the free grace of God in Christ Jesus, as also their desires to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, fall into such evils, as are most opposite, either to the duties of piety towards God, or of common honesty and justice to their fellow-creatures, does it not tend to harden men in their sins, and often fill their mouths with reproaches and blasphemies? Yea, hereupon have men taken offence at the good ways of God, forsaken the worshipping assemblies of his servants, and gone back, *and walked no more*

more with them. Moreover, when some who have, for a time, seemed eminently godly, have, after all, given sad indications of their being utterly graceless, it has been apt to create uncharitable jealousies in the breasts of christians themselves, and to lessen their esteem for one another. Neither is it to be doubted, but the falls of those persons, do often cause many sincere and watchful saints to question the safety of their own condition ; the grace and gifts of those that fell, appearing once, in their apprehensions, far beyond what they themselves had ever attained unto. Is it not a very perplexing case, when serious christians are at a loss to make the practices of some professors consistent with the grace of God ? And when they are at far greater loss to find any evidences of a work of grace in themselves, which did not formerly appear in those persons ? Now, that persons of such a character, as I have been representing, do thus fall, is a melancholy truth, too sadly evident in all places where religion has been professed ; so that to produce instances of this kind, would be as superfluous, as it would be unpleasant. And when, or wheresoever, the wise and holy God suffers such things to occur, his providence therein looks with a dark and gloomy aspect, in

in their apprehensions, who are most tenderly concerned for his glory in the world.

THE conduct of providence is also to us very astonishing, in those dreadful afflictions, and even complicated calamities, that attend some, whom we cannot but esteem, as very serious and godly persons: their bitter troubles being, sometimes, beyond what is common to men. I have known some of this character, who have been deprived of reason and understanding, and rendered utterly incapable of personal, and relative duties: yea, and under those sad circumstances, so far left in the enemies hands, as to utter very evil words, contrary to those holy principles, which used to influence them at other times, to the great dishonour of God, and the no small grief of the godly observers, to whom those dispensations of providence, have appeared very dark, and mysterious. Very prodigious and amazing was the dreadful calamity, with which the good people of *New-England* were exercised, in, or about the year 1692, of which you have a particular account in a book, called the *wonders of the invisible world*. But the holy scripture furnishes us with the most remarkable instance of the depth of distress, to which a godly man may be subject, in the case of *Job*: so that we may not only say,

say, there is a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity^f; but also, that the wise and holy God does sometimes see fit, in a strange manner, to correct and try those who depart from iniquity. From these things, we may infer,

(1.) THAT we are to learn our duties, rather from the precepts of God, than the practices of the best of men: and that we may more certainly know the truly religious, by the characters the scripture gives them, than by the conduct of divine providence towards them.

As to the former, the greatest saints, and most eminent ministers, desire to be followed by others, no farther, than they follow Christ themselves. And the bad examples of the best men, will not excuse, nor yet extenuate our sins at the righteous bar of God; much less give us a licence to break his laws: nay, when others stray out of the pure ways of life, it should indeed make us much more concerned, to walk strictly and steadily therein. Has not religion suffered enough, and too much already, from the hands of her friends? And shall we also go away^g, and give more, and deeper wounds, to the bleeding and languishing cause of Jesus Christ? God forbid!

AND

^f Job xxxi. 1.

^g John vi. 6, 7.

AND then, as to the latter observation, our faith should not be staggered, with respect to any of the truths we profess, by the fiery trials, and uncommon calamities which do, or may attend ourselves, or any of our brethren in Christ Jesus: for the wise God has not made it the rule of his government, to distinguish orthodox christians by the sun-beams of prosperity; nor by sad and dismal providences, to discover unsound and mistaken professions. If the sacred scriptures reveal the doctrines we believe, and prescribe the ways in which we walk; we ought to *hold fast our profession without wavering^h*, or *fear; though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the seaⁱ*.

(2.) LET us be stirred up, from hence, earnestly to pray to God, that he would, for his name's sake, keep us from falling into sin, and, as far as may be for his glory, from falling under sad calamities.

WE ought not ever to think, that our mountain bands so strong, as that we shall never be moved, or that we shall die in our nests: for, as in a day of temptation, those who have been most eminent in grace, have fallen into very dreadful sins, as *David, Peter, and others*; so, by surprising and tremendous providences, those who have

^h Heb. x. 23. ⁱ Psal. xlvi. 2.

have enjoyed the most prosperous circumstances, have soon been stript of all their outward comforts. That good man, who was clothed with robes of majesty, and dwelt as a king in the army, and as one that comforteth the mourner^k; yet was, by a swift series of uncommon and tragical calamities, brought to scrape himself with a potsherd, and sit down among the ashes^l, without any to comfort him. When we pray to be kept from sin, we may be sure we ask that which is agreeable to the divine will: and when we pray that we may not fall under dreadful providences, we ought, in so doing, to prefer the honour of God above our own tranquility, and submit our wills to his sovereign pleasure; and then we may comfortably hope that, through Christ, God will deal in mercy with us, in all our ways.

(3.) *LET these things teach us to exercise charity towards such, as are overtaken in faults; and to avoid censuring those, whom the wise God, in a singular manner, afflicts.*

FOR not only many of those that have real grace, fall into great sins; but such who are eminent in grace, may fall into those sins, which are most opposite to the grace, wherein they are most eminent. As Abraham, who excelled in faith, and, when he was called

^k Job xxix. ^l Job ii. 8.

called of God to go into a *strange land*, *be obeyed*, *not knowing whither he went*¹; of whom it is also said, that, *he believed God*, *and staggered not through unbelief*^m; yet, this great believer denied, and thereby exposed his wife, lest he should be killed for her sake. *The man Moses*, who *was meek above all the men of the earth*ⁿ, falls into a passion, and, for his rash words, is denied entering into the land of promise, the type of heaven. The like may be observed concerning *David*, *Peter*, and others. Though we must not vindicate, extenuate, nor favour any man's sin; yet it is good for us to hope and think the best, that the rules of piety and religion will admit, concerning every man's state. Indeed when the wise and righteous sovereign of heaven and earth does, in a terrible, and unusual manner, afflict any of the children of men; *they are then, in an especial manner concerned, to search and try their ways, and intreat the Lord to shew them, wherefore he contends with them*^o: but for others to think that persons thus corrected, *are sinners above all men*^p; or that they have been guilty of some more than ordinary crimes, for which *the arrows of the Almighty are within them, and the poison thereof drinketh up their spirits*,

¹ Heb. xi. 8. ^m Rom. iv. 20. ⁿ Numb. xii. 3. ^o Job x. 2. ^p Luke xiii. 4.

rits^q, is to fall into the same sin, with Job's friends, and for which the wrath of the Lord was kindled against them^r. Besides, it may be often observed, that men of the greatest grace, groan under the most bitter sorrows, and that persons of the brightest characters, are led through the most bewildering, and perplexing troubles in this world. But to proceed,

NINTHLY, I cannot but think that the dealing of God with his chosen, and peculiar people the Jews, may well serve for another instance that his judgments are a great deep, and the foot-steps of his holy providence too mysterious, for us to search them out to perfection.

THESE were the people the Lord set his love upon, and that he chose for himself, above all the people that were upon the face of the earth^s. He shewed his signs among them, and his wonders in the land of Ham^t: yea, many times did he deliver them; he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry; and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies: he made them also to be pitied of all these that carried them captives^u. For many hundred years, the Lord shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments, unto

^q Job vi. 4.
6, 7.

^r Job xlii. 7.
Psal. cv. 27.

^s Deut. vii.
^u Psal. cxi. 43—46.

unto *Israel*; while he did not deal so with any other nation, and for his judgments, they did not know them^w. Now, that, after all this, blindness should happen to the greatest part of this people, and that God should give them a spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not bear: yea, that God should conclude them all in unbelief, and reject them, and break them off from the good olive-tree; while Gentile sinners, wild by nature, and contrary to nature, were grafted in the good olive-tree, is such an astonishing mystery of providence, as caused the great apostle to cry out, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out*^x! And it very much adds to the mysterious nature of the divine conduct towards them, that, notwithstanding there are so many promises of their conversion, and so many prayers night and day going up to heaven, for the accomplishment of these promises; yet, that they should still remain utterly ignorant of, and blasphemous enemies against, the true *Messiah*, who is so plainly described, in that part of the scripture, which they own, daily read, and profess the greatest veneration for. The comfortable doctrine of the *Jews* conversion to our Lord *Jesus Christ*,

^w Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.

^x Rom. xi.

Christ, is frequently inculcated in both testaments. The nations are to bear the word of the Lord, and this is to be declared in the isles afar off, that he that scattered Israel will gather them, Jer. xxxi. 10. Now surely, they have not yet been saved, the second time, from *Affyria*^y; neither have *the children of Israel and Judah been gathered, under one head*; as it is prophesied they shall be, *Hosea i. 11.* There is indeed, and long has been a thick *vail upon their hearts*; but, the apostle assures us, the time will come, when *the vail shall be taken away*, and they shall *turn to the Lord*^z; and though *their blindness continue, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*; yet, then *all Israel shall be saved*^a; i. e. the body of the nation shall be converted to the blessed *Messiah*, and brought into a state of salvation; and *as the casting them away was the reconciling of the world, so the receiving them will be life from the dead*^b. And now, as there have been, in ages past, so I hope there are, at this day, many of the favourites of heaven, who pray earnestly for the fulfilling of these precious promises, in the conversion of this people, who have been so long under the dreadful and visible curse of God^c.

K

They

^y Isai. xi. 11. ^z 2 Cor. iii. 16. ^a Rom. xi. 25, 26. ^b vers. 15. ^c Isai. lxii. 1. and vers. 6, 7.

They have also *Moses* and the prophets, to direct them to Christ; but yet, so dark are the divine dispensations towards them, that they have remained now, for many ages, *without a king, and without a prince, without a sacrifice, and without an image, without an ephod, and without teraphim*, Hosea iii. 4. This text seems to be a very apt, and sad description of the forlorn and dreadful state that the *Jews* have been long under, and that, both with respect to their civil, and ecclesiastical circumstances. With respect to the former, as a nation, for many hundred years, they have neither had *king* nor *prince*; but have been under the government of strangers^d. This has been the state of the ten tribes, for two thousand four hundred years, or thereabout: for it was in the sixth year of *Hezekiah*, that *Samaria* was taken, and *Israel* carried away captives into *Affyria*^e; which is computed to be more than seven hundred years, before the coming of *Christ*. And though the scepter did not entirely depart from *Judah*, till the blessed *Messiah* came; yet it is now near seventeen hundred years at least, since they, who would have no king but *Cæsar*, have neither had *king*, nor *prince* of their own; and so have neither power

^d *Bur.* in *loc.* *Jurieu crit. hist.* vol. i. p. 409.
^e *2 King.* xviii. 10.

power to establish, or perform, either true, or false worship ; the one signified by the *sacrifice*, and *ephod*, and the other by the *image*, and *teraphim*. And though it is certain, that, after all this, the time will come, when they shall *seek the Lord their God, and David their king*, as it is prophesied in the next verse^f ; yet, as a worthy modern observes, “ the Jews are at present, and “ have been, for a long time, the most invete- “ rate enemies, which Christ has in the “ world ; their rabbies speak of him, in their “ books, with the greatest malignity, and “ blasphemy ; and have taught their disciples “ to curse him, who is the son of the Blessed^g.”

Now, when we consider the former kindness of God towards this people, the sure promises he has made them, the many prayers his servants, without ceasing, offer up to him for them, and the dreadful state in which they still remain, “ *being*,” as a great man observes, “ *a people put by them-“ selves, with a visible mark of divine“ wrath upon them, not having so much as a“ piece of the earth they can call their own^h,* “ *and having been already longer cast off,“ than they were a people, before the coming“ of Christ*,” as is noted by the learned

^f Hos. iii. 5. ^g D. J. Mather, of faith, and fervency in prayer, p. 21. ^h Fleming fulfill. script. p. 190.

*Charnock*¹: we must, I say, conclude from these things, that God, in the course of his holy providence towards them, hath covered himself with clouds; *clouds and thick darkness are round about him*^k.

FROM hence we may learn,

(1.) THAT, for any generation of men to abuse the means of grace, is a sin very provoking to God, and often proves very fatal to them, and their posterity.

WHILE all the rest of the world were groping in pagan darkness, the light of divine revelation darted its bright and glorious rays on this people: they were signally favoured by the God of heaven: he not only sent them all his servants the prophets; but, *last of all, he sent them his son*^l. But they killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto them^m; and not only so, but they also denied the holy one and the justⁿ; they reviled and blasphemed the prince of life, and said concerning him, *this is the heir, come, let us kill him*: they preferred a murderer above their rightful Lord, and cried out, with one voice, *not this man, but Barabbas*^o. And though, such was the astonishing riches of grace, that they had the first tender of the great Redeemer's blood, who shed it with

¹ vol. ii. p. 635. ^k Psal. xcvi. 2. ^l Heb. i. 1. ^m Matt. xxiii. 37. ⁿ Acts iii. 14. ^o Joh. xviii. 40.

with their cruel hands^p; yet these ungrateful, hard-hearted monsters reject this matchless offer, as unworthy of their regard^q. These things provoked the just and righteous God, to give them up to *blindness of mind, and hardness of heart*. And though I am under no doubt about that problem, *viz. whether the hardening of the Jews as a nation, doth not unavoidably involve in it the sin against the Holy Ghost*^r? Nor can I, with the learned Dr. Lightfoot^s, disbelieve, or doubt of their future conversion, because of the greatness of their sin; yet, it is evident, that by abusing the choicest means of grace, and refusing to comply with the most endearing obligations to a life of religion, they have brought on themselves, and their posterity, a remarkable and dreadful curse, and that of a very long continuance too. O how many generations of this unhappy people have lived and died blasphemers of the blessed *Jesus*! Let such seriously consider of this, who now enjoy the same mercies, they once did, and take heed they do not imitate them in sin, lest they should bring on themselves, and those that succeed them, the dreadful judgments, under which the miserable, forsaken *Jews* remain to this day; and that

K 3

also,

^p Luk. xxiv. 47. ^q Acts xiii. 46. ^r See
D. J. Mather on conversion of the *Jews*, p. 9.
^s vol. ii. p. 1123.

also, without any ground to expect that mercy, to their latest posterity, which, in God's time, shall reach *the out-casts of Israel, and recover the dispersed of Judah*^t.

(2.) LET us learn, not to be discouraged, though God do not immediately answer our prayers, nor fulfil his gracious promises.

HUMBLE supplications, offered up by faith, in the name of Jesus, make sometimes a slow, but always a sure and gainful return. It is often the pleasure of our wise and good God, to keep the acceptable prayers of his servants by him for many years; yea, for many ages. How long did the old testament believers pray for the coming of the *Messiah*? God heard them, though they lived not to see the blessed days of the son of man. So the followers of Christ, under the gospel, have, from generation to generation, been praying that the fulness of the Gentiles might be brought in, the persecuted servants of Christ delivered, and great Babylon come in remembrance before God; and that all the tribes of Israel may look to him whom they have pierced; and embrace and adore the glorious *Messiah*, whom they have so long blasphemed. Now though, for a long time, God has seemed, with respect to these things, to take little notice of either his own promises,

^t *Isai. xi. 12.*

mises, or his saints prayers ; yet, in his own time and way, he will fulfil the one, and answer the other ; and that even, in the conversion of the unbelieving and hard-hearted *Jews* : he will gather the *out-casts of Israel, and many others besides those that are already gathered*^o. All the pious requests God's children have made for his *Sion*, are in his book of remembrance ; and he does hear, and will answer his own *elect*, *that cry unto him night and day*^w : and those of them that do not live to see their prayers answered, yet, when they die, will find they were not lost. We must not then conclude God has not accepted our prayers, because we cannot discern that he has yet answered them. For,

(3.) *We should learn, with faith and patience, to wait until God's time for the fulfilling of his providences, and answering our prayers, is come.*

OUR God, who has left such precious promises on record, for his servants to plead in their prayers, has, in his wise and eternal purpose, fixed the time of their performance. *Stephen says, when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn unto Abraham, the people grew, and multiplied in Egypt*^x, &c. God promised *Abraham* a son, but he received him not, till his

old age ; he engaged to give *Canaan* to his seed ; but first, they must be *four hundred years strangers in a land that was not theirs* : and it is now some thousands of years, since some of those promises, made to the *Jews*, were delivered by the prophets ; and yet the happy period of time, prefixed by infinite wisdom, for their accomplishment, is still to come : but it is most reasonable, that he who has freely promised, without being obliged, should perform at his own pleasure, and that we should wait his time, knowing that, as he has made the best promises, so he will certainly choose the best time to fulfil them.

TENTHLY, and lastly, *The conduct of God's sovereign providence, is to us very mysterious, and wonderful, in that; whereas all true christians have the same perfect revelation for their rule, and the same unerring spirit for their guide; yet that, even amongst those who deny no fundamental article of christian doctrine, and even those of them, who have arrived to great attainments in wisdom and grace, there have been, and still are, such different apprehensions of divine things, as have too often proved of a very pernicious consequence to the precious interest of Christ, for which they are all cordially concerned.*

THAT

Gen. xv. 13,

THAT persons who do not own, or do not enjoy the holy scriptures, being left to their own vain and extravagant imaginations, without any perfect rule to guide them, in forming their conceptions of divine things, should differ in their sentiments, and vary in their notions, is not to be wondered at: or, that those, who are destitute of grace, and therefore, are for such a religion, as is most agreeable to their vain minds, most fashionable among men, or that will least debar them of their sinful delights, and most contribute to their worldly profit, should, by some or other of those things, be so biased in their judgments, as widely to differ in their religious sentiments and practices, from men that are actuated, and led by more noble principles, is not strange or surprising: but, that persons, who daily read the divine oracles, and esteem them as the only rule of their faith and practice, and who have all received that same blessed spirit into their hearts, who first dictated, and who can perfectly explain those deep things of God; that those who pay the greatest veneration to the inspired writings, search them diligently, and with the utmost sincerity, pray to God, to guide them into all truth; that such excellent men as these, I say, should thus differ in their judgments, and that differences

ferences of this kind, should be among the godly in all generations, is surely an apparent instance of the incomprehensible depths of divine providence. For, by this means, the affections of christians are sadly, though unjustly, alienated one from another; yea, sometimes their communion, in the ordinances of their common Lord, has been hereby much interrupted, and too often, their comfortable fellowship therein, finally dissolved; nay, their spirits have been so sowered, and exasperated one against another, that they have not forborn to treat one another with much uncharitableness and censure, to the very great grief of pious observers, the discredit of religion, and the hardening of the hearts of the ungodly. Now, can we observe differences in judgment, causing such dismal divisions in the family of *Christ*, as tear in pieces their religious societies, and cause mirth and triumph in the dwellings of their common, and inveterate enemies, and not conclude, that the righteous and wise providence, that, at least, suffers these things, is very dark and mysterious? Hence, then, let us learn,

(1.) *THAT union among a body of people is no certain mark, or character, that they are the true church, and people of God; as the papists falsely teach.*

FOR

FOR, there is nothing more common, than for ungodly men to unite in that which is evil, and the most godly to differ about some things that are good. The wicked *Jews* agree in their barbarous treatment of the blessed son of God, and cry out, with one consent, *crucify him, crucify him*^a: yet *Paul* and *Barnabas* so sharply contend, that they part asunder^a. And if unity were an infallible property of a true church, yet it is well known, that these great pretenders to it, have little to boast, and may neither for their number, nor concord, compare with the blasphemous *Mahometans*: for, not to mention the wide difference between the *Jansenists*, and the followers of *Molinos*, Mr. *Fox* reckons up no less than one hundred sorts, among the monks and friars^b; and it is no wonder that we find their writers differ, when some of them hold that, for canonical scripture, which others do not: yea, *Stapleton*, an *English* papist, is not ashamed to say, that the church may add more books to the canonical scriptures, by her absolute authority^c. It is also notorious, with what fury they have persecuted one another, for their different sentiments; wherein it is pity protestants ever did, or ever

^a Luke xxiii. 18. ^a Acts xv. 39. ^b *Mar-*
tyrol. p. 260. ^c Dr. *Willet's* synop. papismi. p. 85.
See more in *Baxter's* key for *Catholicks*, p. 54.

ever should imitate them. It was a point much disputed about the year 1476, between the *Scotists* and the *Thomists*, whether the virgin *Mary* was conceived in sin ; and it is well known, how hotly this has been debated between the *Dominicans* and the *Franciscans* : the former affirmed, she was thus tainted with original defilement ; but the latter, having the greatest power, tho' the weakest arguments, (which has not been uncommon) they condemned, and burned four of the *Dominicans* at *Bern*, on this account. Nay, we find their infallible *Popes* have not only burned each others decrees, but the one has put out the other's eyes, and then put him to death. Thus did *Gregory* by *John XVIII.* And, as it has been no uncommon thing for their *Popes* to murder one another ; so, there has been most bloody wars betwixt the pope and the people ; witness that between the citizens of *Rome* and pope *Gregory IX.*, when the sword devoured at once no less than thirty thousand persons^a. But instances of this kind are even endless ; and indeed, that union which they have, is rather from the terror of the sword, than the light of truth. Let them but give men free toleration to chose a religion for themselves, and then see, what will become of their union. Men may peaceably differ

^a See *Fox's martyrol.* vol i. p. 256.

differ about the minuter matters of religion on earth, and yet certainly meet, and entirely unite in heaven. Nay, I am much of good old *Latimer's* mind, *viz.* that *a deform disagreement is better in the church, so Christ be preached; than a uniform ignorance, agreeing in idolatry.*

(2.) *THIS should teach us humility. Let us not proudly and vainly think, that we are in all things right, and that those that differ from us, so far certainly wrong.*

THE best of men know but in part, while cloathed with mortality; and, therefore, as to those things, wherein we differ from other eminent christians, we ought to examine ourselves, if we are not deceived: and though we find all things right, yet being sensible of human frailty, we should still think modestly concerning ourselves, and charitably towards others. The Lord delights to reveal his will to the humble; and a right understanding therein, will make men humble. To be established indeed in the truths of Christ, is the duty and excellency of a christian; but we may surely attain to this, without being puffed up with a proud conceit of our own knowledge; for it is our glory, as well as our duty, *in honour to prefer one another* ^{c.}

(3.) **WE**

^{c.} *Rom. xii. 10.*

(3.) WE should, from hence, also learn, not to receive any thing for truth, purely because some good men have so esteemed it; nor to reject any thing for an error, only because some persons of great judgment and piety, have disowned it.

FOR since the wise God suffers the best men to entertain different sentiments of divine things, it is certain, they cannot be all right in their notions, but are all imperfect in their knowledge; so that we ought not to embrace, and adhere to any man's opinion in religion, any farther, than it appears founded on, and agreeable with, the sacred book of God. We are, in this respect, *to call no man our father, or master, upon earth*; i. e. we are not to look on any man's dictates infallible, or, as such, binding to our consciences: this is the particular prerogative of our supreme Lord; *for one only is our master, even Christ^f.* On the other hand, we must take heed we do not reject truth, under the notion of error, because it has been accounted so by some, who have deservedly been greatly esteemed in the church of God. Were we to relinquish every thing that any good man has accounted an error, how many precious truths, relating to doctrine and discipline, must we then part with? But, blessed be God, we have

^f Matt. xxiii. 8, 9.

have a more perfect, and sure rule for our faith, than the judgment of the wisest and best among fallible men, *whereunto we do well that we take heed* ^g.

TO CONCLUDE, upon the whole, if the providences of God are so very dark, and mysterious,

(1.) *LET us then learn, to seek greater measures of faith, and patience; that we may comfortably hope, and wait for the bright and glorious events of the most trying and gloomy dispensations.*

FOR, how often have those things appeared with the most dismal aspect, which have had the most sweet and benign issue? It is not for us to judge of *the end of a thing*, by the *beginning*: for, as we know, a consuming storm of fire and brimstone has succeeded the sun-shine of a bright and serene morning; so, the most dark and cloudy days of trouble have been often cleared up with the smiling rays of divine mercy. The same providence that suffered *David* to be banished from the kingdom of *Judah*, and the church of God, even after he was anointed, in its appointed time, placed the crown upon his head, and gave him *rest from all his enemies round about*. *Naomi* and *Ruth* lose their husbands, and are reduced to great straits in the country of *Moab*; which occasions

caisons their return into the land of *Judea*, where they enjoyed the precious ordinances of God, and the latter had the honour of being married into that noble line, from whence the great Saviour of the world was to proceed. The conduct of providence seemed very dark and distressing toward that poor woman who suffered so many things, and spent all that she had upon physicians, and was nothing better, but rather grew worse: but in the end, the clouds scatter, she is at once, freely, and perfectly healed, by the compassionate word of Christ himself^b, yea, owned, and commended by him, and sent away with his blessing. And, did not providence seem to look with a melancholy and frowning countenance upon those parents, whose son was *born blind*¹; from which we find the disciples were too forward and drew a mistaken conclusion, in judging, that some peculiar sin had brought this sad affliction upon them? But, how convincing to others, and comfortable to themselves, was the event, when they had not only a seeing, but a believing child restored to them? The like may be observed concerning *Jairus's* little daughter. She died, it seems, while her father came to Christ to seek her life: and did it not look very dark and distressing, to have such

an

^b Mark v. 26, 34. ¹ John ix. 1.

an endearing enjoyment snatched away, while he was taking the best measures to secure it? But it is but a few moments e'er the scene is happily altered, and his dear child, for whom he went to *Jesus*, is, by his omnipotent arm, brought up out of the valley of the shadow of death^k. Providence, which seemed at first, to cross his prayers, soon gave him his heart's desire. Now, though our exercises may not be exactly the same, nor our mercies of that extraordinary nature, with those we have been speaking of; yet, as the more mysterious part of the word of God is explained, by that which is more plain and easy; so, even in our days, very frequently, the wise ends and kind designs of God, in, and under dark providences, are made more plain and legible, by the light of succeeding, and similing dispensations. Our interest and duty is, therefore, to be pressing after such a measure of faith, that, under the most trying providences, we may be able to apply the sure promises of God; hope in his tender and everlasting mercies, and wait patiently till his good time comes, and then there shall arise light out of darkness; for we cannot be under more sad, and sinking circumstances, than some that have gone before us, who have, after all, experienced

L

that

^k Mark v. 23—25.

that light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart¹. And, to add no more,

(2.) How should the thoughts of these things cause us to long after that blissful state, where, to our entire satisfaction, we shall understand the word and works of God, and, with ravishing pleasure, behold how sweetly they harmonize together?

THE perfect light of the heavenly Jerusalem, will enable us to form right conceptions of the most puzzling circumstances that have attended us in this vale of tears: our doubts will be, there, all resolved, and our minds furnished with all desirable knowledge, without any labour or pains; neither is it improbable, that the most afflictive providences, with which the children of God are now exercised, will be productive of much more delight and pleasure in that world, than they have been of grief and sorrow in this. And, in those dispensations, which, in this imperfect state, seem most severe and terrible, we may, perhaps, hereafter, see most of the wisdom, faithfulness, and goodness too, of our heavenly father. And why should we then be fond of a long stay in this dark and misty region, where we can discern so little of the attracting glory of our God, and are, in

many

¹ Psal. lvii. 11.

many respects, liable to mistake the way of our duty towards him ; as also much at a loss to understand many passages of his wise and holy conduct towards us ? Were it not much better to be in that happy state where all these things shall be fully cleared up ? For, though *now we see but through a glass darkly, yet then we shall see face to face*^m.

^m 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

F I N I S.



BOOKS written by Mr. JOSEPH STENNETT, and sold by AARON WARD in Little Britain.

1. *GOD's awful Summons to a sinful Nation considered*: in a Sermon preached Nov. 27, 1737. in Commemoration of the dreadful Storm, which happened on that Day, in the Year 1703. *The Second Edit.*

2. *The Christian Strife for the Faith of the Gospel*. A Sermon preached before a Society of Ministers and Gentlemen, engaged in a Design for the Encouragement of young Men in their Studies for the Ministry, 1738. *The Second Edition.*

3. *National Ingratitude exemplified, in the Case of Gideon, and his Family; and applied to the present times*. A Sermon preached in Little Wild-street, Novemb. 5, 1740. *The Fifth Edition.*

4. *The Nature, and Reward of true Liberality*. A Sermon preached at the Funeral of Mr. Samuel Burch, 1740.

5. A Sermon occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Mr. Joseph Collet; preached at Coat, in the County of Oxford.

Where may be had, in Four Volumes Octavo,

The Works of the late Reverend and Learned Mr. Joseph Stennett. Containing not only a Collection of those printed in his Life-time, but also a large Number of Sermons, together with divers Tracts and Poems, never before published. To which is prefixed some Account of his Life.



